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THE BRIGHT ISLAND

By ARNOLD BENNETT

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THINGS THAT HAVE INTERESTED ME
THINGS THAT HAVE INTERESTED ME. *Second Series*

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THE
BRIGHT ISLAND

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BY
ARNOLD BENNETT



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THE BRIGHT ISLAND

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CHARACTERS

In the order of their appearance

SUSAN MADDOX: *an explorer.*

JAMES MADDOX: *a naval officer, her brother.*

CAPITAN: *a young Court official.*

DOCTOR: *an old Court official.*

HARLEQUIN: *the King's valet.*

PIERROT: *the King.*

COLUMBINE: *an official dancer, younger daughter of
Pantaloön.*

PANTALOON: *a democratic leader.*

ISABELLA: *a feminist, elder daughter of Pantaloön.*

32545.

NOTES ON THE CHARACTERS

The British characters are modern British.

The island characters are the traditional figures of the old Italian comedy, some of them very familiar to the playgoers of all Western countries. They wear the traditional costumes, and to a certain extent have the traditional characteristics; but throughout the brilliant period of Italian comedy the well-known personages were continually being modified either by authors or actors, and the process of alteration is here carried still further.

SUSAN: Aged about 28. A pretty, rather flighty Society maiden who after exhausting the pleasure-possibilities of London has taken to exploration in search of new diversions.

MADDOX: Susan's brother. Aged about 32. Good-looking. Gruff. Ruthless. Accustomed to command, well inured to danger.

CAPITAN: Aged about 25. Handsome. Of aristocratic Caspian descent. A swaggering but timid fool. Well-bred and thoroughly accustomed to public life.

viii NOTES ON THE CHARACTERS

DOCTOR: Aged about 65. Wily. Subtle. Serpentine. Unscrupulous. Always very calm and polite.

HARLEQUIN: Aged about 40. A man of the people who knows all the psychology of courts and who scorns the people. A rapid talker.

PIERROT: Aged about 30. Highly distinguished. A fine manner. Never undignified. Honest. Somewhat disillusioned.

COLUMBINE. Aged about 20. Very beautiful. Very simple. Very ignorant. Very obstinate. Very clinging. She gradually develops into the typical home-woman without an idea beyond the home. As regards this and the two following characters it is to be specially noted that in Caspo the difference between the deportment of the upper classes and the deportment of the lower classes is far less striking than in England.

PANTALON: Aged about 55. An ignorant, unimaginative, persevering, democratic pioneer with excellent intentions but of limited outlook.

ISABELLA: Aged about 25. Personable. Graceful. Somewhat hard in manner save at certain moments. Clear-headed. Very intelligent. Very resolute. A girl of remarkable individuality.

THE BRIGHT ISLAND

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ACT I

The scene is laid in the grounds of the Royal Palace of the island of Caspo. To the left is the palace. Back and right the grounds overlook the ocean, which cannot be seen except in the distance near the horizon.

In the centre is the King's seat, with a movable awning which can be made to screen the occupant of the seat and those with him from the view of the palace.

[Enter Maddox and Susan.]

Susan. Well, anyhow, we're alive.

Maddox. I know that.

Susan. Well, even if we'd landed in England we couldn't say more for ourselves.

Maddox [*looking back*]. Sure that boat's fast.

[Enter Capitan.]

Susan. Quite. Oh! There's a man.

Maddox [*shouting to Capitan*]. Hello!

Capitan. Hello!

Maddox [*to Susan*]. English, by Jove!

Susan. But what funny clothes.

Maddox. Native costume. We must have dropped on one of those bally crown colonies. I wonder which one. [*Casually to Capitan, who is advancing.*] Hi! Is this a crown colony? If so, which?

Capitan [*threateningly; drawing his sword*]. Death and pestilence! Do you know who I am?

Maddox [*drily*]. What are you going to do with that sword?

Capitan [*suddenly meek*]. Sell it, sir. Will you buy it?

Susan. Oh! This place is perfectly too quaint. [*To Capitan.*] May I look at it? [*With much charm she takes the sword from him.*]

Maddox [*quietly*]. Now, my friend, let us begin again. What is the name of this island?

Capitan. Caspo.

Maddox. Never heard of it. [*To Susan.*] Have you? [*She shakes her head.*]

Capitan. It is very select.

Maddox. British colony?

Capitan [*fiercely*]. British colony!

Susan. Excuse our ignorance. You see we belong to the English governing class. James is a naval officer—wireless. And I'm a—woman.

Maddox [*grimly; to Capitan*]. Well?

Capitan [*meekly*]. This is the *Kingdom* of Caspo.

Susan. But you speak English so beautifully.

Capitan [*proudly*]. Ah yes! Years ago a

British ship was wrecked here. Three souls were saved.

Maddox. Where are they now?

Capitan. I don't know.

Maddox [*suspicious*]. Why don't you know?

Capitan. They died.

Maddox [*relieved*]. Oh, is that all?

Capitan. English became fashionable. Then, not so long since, a box with immense quantities of English papers in it floated ashore. And we learnt to admire you still more.

Maddox. From our newspapers?

Capitan. With the result that English is now the official language of the Court, and ranks next to dancing in social and political merit.

Susan. So there is a Court!

Capitan. Did I not refer to the *Kingdom* of Caspo?

Susan. And Court officials? How delicious! Jim, I do believe at last I've struck something more amusing than dance-clubs and cocktails.

Maddox. Don't bank on it—that's my advice. May get hung. Nuisance.

Susan [*laughing off Maddox's remark*]. And you are a Court official?

Capitan. Madam, it is not an exaggeration to say that I am the most important personage in Caspo—after the King, of course.

Maddox. I knew it from the first.

Susan. And what *are* you, you perfect dear?

Capitan. Marshal of the Mob—

Susan. Of course you are.

Capitan. And Keeper of the Night Watch.

Susan. How adorable!

Capitan. It is dawn, and you have found me almost in the act of going to bed.

Maddox. Well, before you go to bed you might just take me to the King.

Capitan [*with a disdainful smile*]. My dear sir, you cannot see the King like that. Tell me your business, and the affair shall be transmitted through the proper channels.

Maddox [*firmly and even menacingly*]. Come, come! When an Englishman gets into a strange place he always insists on seeing the boss right off. Hurry up, please, and inform the King that two British subjects have arrived.

Susan. One specimen of each sex.

Maddox [*taking sword from Susan and handing it to Capitan; more persuasively*]. Here. You may as well take this ornament. Now—let's get a move on.

Capitan. It will be very difficult.

Maddox. How difficult?

Capitan. Well—[*hesitates*]. You see, His Majesty, according to immemorial custom, will bestow a present on you—whatever may happen to you later.

Maddox. So far so good.

Capitan. A handsome present.

Maddox. So much the better.

Capitan. It will be necessary for you to give me one third of the value of that present. Of course I do not in the least need it. But the rules and usages of the ancient Court of Caspo are sacred. And if I accepted less than one third I should be dishonoured for ever.

Maddox. That's all right then.

[*Enter Doctor.*]

[*Capitan moves towards him, and they bow to each other with much mutual deference.*]

Doctor. Marshal and Keeper!

Capitan. Doctor! What is amiss?

Doctor. His Majesty has arisen.

Maddox. That's something.

Capitan [*moved*]. But it isn't eight o'clock!

Doctor. His Majesty has arisen.

Capitan. But what can be the matter?

Doctor. Can it be that he is anxious about the mob?

Capitan [*bullying*]. The mob? Why?

Doctor [*firmly*]. Ah! You, the Marshal, should know better than I.

Capitan [*subsiding*]. Doctor, through my seventy-seven chief agents I can claim a complete knowledge, an absolute omniscience, concerning the mob. Believe me, there is nothing the matter with it. A few agitators—possibly. But the great heart of the people beats true.

Doctor. Nevertheless His Majesty has not

been himself since his triumphal progress through the industrial north. The fact is that King Pierrot—

Susan [to Maddox]. ‘King Pierrot!’ How utterly bewitching! Oh, Jim, I’m so glad I decided to give up selling painted furniture and be an explorer.

Doctor [seeing Susan; excited]. Who is this exquisite creature in this exciting costume?

Susan [approaching]. My name is Susan Maddox.

Doctor. How romantic a name!

Susan. I am seeing the world on my own. Columbus sort of thing—you know.

Doctor. I—I—[ecstatic and inarticulate]

Capitan. These excellent persons are apparently British. They have descended from heaven knows where—

Doctor. Heaven! Heaven!

Susan. Do I understand that the dear King Pierrot is worried by political anxieties? If so—

Doctor. Miss! Listen to me. I will be candid. I am an old man—

Susan. No, no.

Doctor. In years, in experience, in sorrow—

Susan. But not in heart.

Doctor. Ah, Miss!

Susan [moving slightly away from him]. Do go on—about King Pierrot.

Doctor. It may be that political anxieties are

worrying the lord of the earth. But there may also be another cause. Women!

Susan [*nodding*]. Ah! I begin to feel at home already. Too many women!

Doctor. Not enough.

Susan. How many up to now?

Doctor. Not one! Not one! The King has not yet celebrated his first marriage.

Susan. His *first* marriage?

Doctor. Yes. Every man in Caspo—naturally I don't include the mob—every man must have two wives. And to this rule even the King himself can be no exception.

Susan. Two wives! I am shocked.

Doctor. Shocked? Why? Would you deny that two wives are the proper thing?

Susan. In England a man may have only one wife; and to this rule there can be no exception—theoretically.

Doctor. But surely that is not quite nice!

Susan. Not always. But it is better for the women—roughly speaking. Why should a man have two wives, while a woman must put up with half a husband? What about the equality of the sexes? Surely in this paradise you believe in the equality of the sexes?

Doctor. Profoundly, Miss. But of course in Caspo every woman must have two husbands.

Susan. Ah! That puts quite a different complexion on the matter.

Doctor [*beaming*]. We are agreed then. I am so glad.

Susan. But your system must lead to complications.

Doctor. Complications? But complications are life itself.

Susan. How true!

Doctor. The truth is, we haven't enough complications—of that particular nature. I cannot blame the King. He is young. And the Court sets him a bad example. I am a widower—once. Capitan also. And neither of us has—er—filled the gap. Moral laxity! Moral laxity! Society is not what it was.

Susan [*thoughtfully*]. To possess two husbands! To have in one's home, by the snug fire-side, always handy, the ardour of youth and the wise cynicism of age! . . . [*She looks at Doctor and Capitan.*] This is the island of dreams.

Maddox [*stepping forward, to Capitan*]. Now then. Take me to the King, please.

Capitan [*boldly, but intimidated, to Doctor*]. He insists on seeing His Majesty.

Doctor [*taking Maddox aside*]. Seeing His Majesty! My dear sir, you cannot see the King like that. Tell me your business, and the affair shall be transmitted through the proper channels.

Maddox. But I've already arranged to see the King. Who are you? Another Court official?

Doctor. I am Doctor—the King's Physician and Guardian of the Hereditary Dancers. My noble colleague, Capitan, will, I am sure, not disagree with me when I say that I am the most important personage in Caspo—after the King, of course.

Capitan [after a fiery gesture of resentment; weakly]. Certainly. One of the most important.

Maddox. Indeed!

Doctor [drawing *Maddox* aside]. I ought to explain perhaps. When you see the King, His Majesty, according to immemorial custom, will bestow a present on you.

Maddox. Whatever may happen later?

Doctor. Whatever may happen later.

Maddox. A handsome present?

Doctor. A handsome present. It will be necessary for you to give me a third of the value of that present.

Maddox. Quite! Quite! [Going forward.]

[Enter *Harlequin*.]

[*Doctor* and *Capitan* move towards him with an eagerness which they try to conceal. *Harlequin* makes an obeisance to them at once servile and comic. *Maddox* and *Susan* have moved away.]

Harlequin [offering a gold basket of preserved fruit]. His Majesty's breakfast, which His Majesty has commanded me to offer to your Graces.

Doctor [*taking the basket*]. The honour is dazzling.

Capitan [*also taking the basket*]. So much so that I cannot eat. [*He eats a cherry.*]

Doctor. Then His Majesty has no appetite?

Harlequin [*with false servility*]. May the King's valet, the humblest of heaven's creatures, speak briefly to your Graces?

Capitan [*with a magnificent condescension which cannot hide his secret awe of Harlequin*]. Speak.

Doctor [*in a similar tone*]. Briefly.

Harlequin [*volubly*]. Last night, as your doctorial grace is aware, we ate truffles, crab, pickled horseradish, porcupine, embroidered goose, cauliflower and pineapple sausage. We feared the retaliation of nature. Your doctorial grace was summoned to advise. Your doctorial grace was walking in the dancers' garden [*points*]. The moon hung over the illimitable sea [*points*]. The wind was in the south east [*points*]. His Majesty was in his boudoir [*points*]. The terrible Marshal and Keeper was about to begin his sanctified vigil on the shore [*points*]. Your doctorial grace, having entered the royal boudoir, entertained His Majesty at considerable length and with a stupendous vocabulary concerning the perfections of Columbine, the new stipendiary dawn-dancer, who by the way should shortly appear [*points*].

Susan. Columbine!

Harlequin. His Majesty deigned to be interested. I, too, if I may say so, permitted myself to be interested, nay entranced, nay positively spellbound. When your doctorial grace had departed I had the impudence to remember that in the delightful heat engendered by the description of Columbine you had forgotten to advise his Majesty as to the conduct of the royal-stomach. [*During the foregoing speech Harlequin, each time he points, and the eyes of the Doctor and Capitan follow his pointing, snatches a fruit from the basket and swallows it with astounding rapidity.*]

Doctor. True. I did forget.

Harlequin. It was your right. But that I too should forget was a crime for which I cannot absolve myself.

Doctor. But the King?

Harlequin. Heaven [*pointing*] in its great mercy decreed that His Majesty also should forget. But nature did not forget. Whether she chose the cauliflower, the horseradish, the truffles, the porcupine, the goose, or the sausage as the instrument of her vengeance I cannot tell. Suffice it to say that everything happened that could happen. In a word the King has had an eventful night. He deigned to doze but little—between, as it were, two revolutions—and the fourth patrol of the chamber reported to me that when His Maj-

esty did sleep the royal lips twice formed the name of—'Columbine.'

Doctor. I feared it. I feared it. Shall I venture to visit the King?

Harlequin. Useless now! [*Bowing.*] The royal debtor has already—settled his accounts with nature.

Capitan [*offering basket to Harlequin*]. Have some fruit.

Harlequin. I am dissolved in gratitude. But I know my place.

Doctor. Yes. Have some.

Harlequin. *Me*, eat the royal fruit? *Me*, join your august graces in a refection? Unthinkable.

Doctor. Come, come!

[*Harlequin timidly takes a fruit and swallows it with the same astounding rapidity as he has shown in swallowing the others.*]

Capitan. Have another, Harlequin.

Susan [*to Maddox*]. Did you hear that? 'Harlequin' now! [*She laughs.*]

Harlequin [*hearing the laugh and perceiving Maddox and Susan; silyly indicating the latter to Doctor and Capitan*]. I presume that this little phenomenon has not escaped the attention of your graces. [*He takes another fruit.*]

Doctor. By no means. But in the presence of state affairs—[*he approaches Susan again, flirtatiously*].

Harlequin. They seem to be something highly

curious, unusual, irregular, sensational, supernatural, incredible. Are they?

Capitan. Members of the English ruling-class.

Harlequin. Ah! . . . Ah! Your grace of course is incapable of being mistaken. But is your grace sure?

Capitan. That is what they say.

Harlequin. Arrived here?

Capitan. God knows how.

Harlequin. No doubt on the wings of the morning.

Capitan. Er—no doubt.

Harlequin. Always a suspicious method of conveyance. Your grace permits me to address the lady? [*Capitan nods. Susan leaves the Doctor and approaches Harlequin, who questions her in a cajoling, admiring and yet quizzing tone.*] Ethereal wench, let me get at once to the root of the matter. What is the relation between yourself and this male?

Susan [*obviously attracted by Harlequin*]. He is my brother.

Harlequin. How idyllic! [*To Capitan and Doctor.*] Brother indeed! Suspicious! Suspicious! It must already have occurred to your sapient graces that this pair may be agitators of the foul mob in the north, who have learnt English and come to lay a plot in the very heart of the Court.

Doctor. A disturbing conjecture!

Capitan. Death and pestilence! Do you dare to insinuate that my agents would not have—

Maddox [*striding calmly up to Harlequin*]. Look here, do you want your head knocked off? [*Capitan becomes meek.*]

Harlequin. Not particularly. [*To Doctor and Capitan.*] I was wrong. He is English.

Maddox. You say you are the King's valet. [*Harlequin bows.*] Then take me to His Majesty and look sharp about it. I've already made two arrangements to see the King.

Harlequin. Certainly! Certainly! [*Drawing Maddox aside.*] But to see the King is not so easy as wagging your finger. [*He wags his finger.*] His Majesty does not expose himself in a glass case at the cross roads. I—I—

Maddox. You are the most important person in the Kingdom. Granted.

Harlequin. I am nobody. I am dust. I am invisible dust under your feet. But—er—the King will bestow upon you a present.

Maddox. And you want a third of the value of it.

Harlequin. No. Half.

Maddox. That's impossible. I'll give you a third.

Harlequin. I accept. [*To Doctor and Capitan.*] Do your graces agree that this great lord should have the inexpressible honour of being blinded by the King's glance?

Doctor. It would perhaps be the simplest thing in the end.

Capitan. Yes.

[*Enter King Pierrot.*]

[*Languidly, unperceived by the others and yawning politely, he listens to the conversation.*]

Harlequin. Let us consider now the ceremonial. [*To Maddox and Susan, quickly.*] It will take about two hours—say two hours and a quarter. At the grand gate of the inner palace you will fill up the customary forms, giving the names, weights and ages at death—if dead—of your male and female ancestors up to the fourth generation. Then after the customary payments you will pass into the disrobing rooms—one for each sex—strip naked, submit to be searched, and clothe yourself in the costumes of audience. For your own garments you will take a receipt for which you will pay the customary fee. At the foot of the grand stair your portraits will be drawn, for purposes of identification, by the special artist attached to the Head Groom of the Ladder, and for this operation also you will pay the customary fee. Having ascended three steps of the grand stair, you will descend two, backwards, and so on by three's and two's until you attain the summit—if you ever do attain it. You will then proceed to the first antechamber and repeat word by word after the custodian of the first antechamber the special humble request and petition appointed for

the first antechamber. And similarly for the second, third, fourth, fifth and sixth antechambers, in each case paying the customary fee. When you reach the seventh antechamber—*I shall be there*, and you will be subjected by me to a serious and lengthy cross-examination concerning your origin, character, tastes, peculiarities, peccadilloes and purposes. Then at last—

Pierrot. My happy arrival [*all the others start*]*—my happy arrival may save somebody a certain amount of expense.*

[*The two Court officials, startled, bow deeply.*

Maddox salutes. Susan makes a curtsy.

The King advances.]

Susan [*to Harlequin*]. Why don't you bow?

Harlequin. Hsh! Here, I am nobody. I do not exist. Hence I cannot bow.

Susan. How perfect!

Pierrot [*to Capitan*]. Strangers?

Capitan. Strangers, sire.

Pierrot. Welcome.

Maddox. Thank you, your Majesty.

Susan. I hope your Majesty feels better.

Pierrot [*sitting*]. Better?

Harlequin [*to Susan*]. Hsh! The King cannot be ill. Hence he cannot be better.

Susan. How perfect!

Pierrot [*to Maddox*]. Your story?

Maddox. I am an Englishman.

Pierrot. I knew it.

Maddox. How, sire?

Pierrot. Your splendid manner of taking everything for granted. Your name and rank?

Maddox. James Maddox, Naval Officer. This is my sister Susan.

Susan. An explorer, your Majesty, a *light* explorer, driven by feminine curiosity to see the large world. My brother had charge of the wireless in the *S.S. Hippopotamus*.

Pierrot. A ship, or one of the larger mammals?

Maddox. Cruiser. Homeward bound. By special permission of the Admiralty my sister was travelling in the ship. She struck a reef, and began to sink by the stern.

Pierrot. Dear madam, I regret it infinitely. Ah! You mean the ship. Pardon my distraction. [*Politely yawns.*]

Maddox. Then a fog settled down on us. We had to take to the boats. I took to my own collapsible unsinkable boat which I had invented, and my sister joined me.

Pierrot. Nothing contrary to etiquette so far, doctor?

Doctor. Nothing, sire.

Maddox. After many hours alone in the thick fog, we heard the ship's siren. Rowed towards the sound. Siren kept going for a long time; then it grew fainter and fainter. Couldn't hear it at all. The ship had evidently got off. No doubt all the ship's own boats had rejoined her.

Mine, not being official, was probably forgotten.

Pierrot. It is always dangerous not to be official.

Maddox. The fog lifted. We saw this island. Here we are.

Pierrot. But what do you want, if I am not too curious?

Maddox. Your Majesty, in case of accidents, I brought with me in my boat the essential parts of a wireless apparatus. I ask permission to set up a station. All I need is a couple of tall straight trees and a few workmen. I can then signal a ship to come in and take us off.

Pierrot. But why leave us? We are a delicious people, living in a delicious climate. We profoundly understand eating, drinking, dancing, and love. And we have had no lawyers for over a century.

Susan. I should just love to stay, sire.

Doctor. Stay to love, Miss.

Maddox. My sister of course is a free agent. But for myself I must get back.

Pierrot. Why?

Maddox. My duty. For a long time I've felt my duty was to abandon the navy and take up a political career. Always keen on politics.

Pierrot. And what are your politics?

Maddox. I am a realist.

Pierrot. What is that?

Maddox. One who looks the facts in the face and never listens to speeches.

Pierrot [*interested for the first time*]. But this is very interesting. Is your party a large one?

Maddox. No, sir. I am the sole member of it.

Pierrot. It has nothing to do with socialism?

Maddox. Very little.

Pierrot. What is socialism?

Maddox. Frankly, sir, we don't know. Nobody knows. Many years ago a celebrated English writer started out to define socialism. He died last winter at the age of eighty-eight, leaving his task unfinished. All we can say is that everybody in England, except me, is a socialist—

Pierrot. Really?

Susan. Until he gets an income of over a thousand a year.

Pierrot. That at any rate is a clue. You interest me, and I thank you. Now about foreign politics.

Maddox. In foreign politics I am all for the open door, the absolutely wide-open door.

Pierrot. I regret to pain you, but the absolutely shut door is better.

Maddox. But why, sir.

Pierrot. Because the absolutely shut door means no foreign politics. We have no foreign politics in Caspo—none. I found it simpler.

Maddox. But travellers come here?

Pierrot. They do—at rare intervals. But they never go back.

Susan. Well, I don't mind.

Pierrot. Exquisite creature. [*To Maddox.*] Therefore it desolates me to tell you that I cannot permit you to set up that apparatus of yours. I repeat, my policy is the policy of the absolutely shut door. No foreign relations. No going back when you've once come.

Maddox [*shrugs his shoulders; aside*]. A bit thick! [*To Pierrot.*] But, sir, supposing a British war-ship came?

Pierrot. No war-ship can come.

Maddox [*incredulously*]. Indeed?

Pierrot. For many miles round this island there isn't six feet of water. Then also the mists, of which you have had experience, are almost continuous, and as for the currents—

Maddox. A ship could send a boat ashore with a machine-gun or so.

Capitan [*laughing*]. The stranger has not seen our new arrows.

Maddox. And none of your subjects ever leave the islands?

Pierrot. Why should they?

Susan. Curiosity.

Pierrot. That sort of curiosity is not encouraged. To build a boat means death. True, we have boats—but only in museums.

Susan. So that's that. It's a lovely arrange-

ment, because it leaves you free to give the whole of your attention to home politics. And home politics are so much more—intimate!

Pierrot. Capitan, this is your department. Would you say that our home politics are intimate?

Capitan. With due submission I should say that we have no home politics.

Maddox. But you must have home politics.

Capitan. 'Must!' I will show you the city and you shall see. It is inhabited solely by permanent officials, who of course would not be allowed to concern themselves with politics, even if there were any.

Maddox. But who does the work?

Capitan [*hurt*]. The officials, naturally. They are most conscientious. Six hours a day.

Maddox. But I mean the *work*.

Capitan. So do I.

Maddox. Well, who made that coat of yours, for example?

Capitan [*seeing light at last*]. Ah! You mean the industrial population.

Doctor. Ah! he means the industrial population!

Capitan. That's away up in the north of the island—all of it, except of course the servants we must have in the city.

Maddox. How many hours a day does the north work?

Capitan. No rule. Till the day's work is done.

Maddox. What's the minimum wage?

Capitan. No rule. Unfettered competition is always best.

Maddox. What holidays does it take?

Capitan. I never enquired.

Maddox. What are its amusements?

Capitan. I suppose it sleeps and lounges about.

Maddox. Is it educated?

Capitan. It is taught to understand the moral value of honest toil.

Maddox. Is it happy?

Capitan. Oh, perfectly! You see it knows no better. And why should it?

Pierrot [*who has shown interest, suddenly becoming languid*]. Why indeed?

Capitan. You see—

Pierrot. Enough, excellent fellow. Let us avoid tedium. [*To Maddox.*] It is now my pleasure, in accordance with tradition, to bestow a present upon you. Name it.

Maddox. Thirty lashes, sir.

Pierrot. You intrigue me.

Maddox. In order to see your Majesty I had to promise one third of my gift to each of these three personages. I keep my promise, and I ask for thirty lashes.

Pierrot [*smiling*]. The English are sublime. I

love them. [*To the other three men; still smiling.*] Oblige me very much by going to the Executioner's Office instantly, and demanding for yourselves ten good lashes apiece. While you are enjoying my gift to our visitor I will talk further with these English.

[*Exeunt Doctor, Capitan and Harlequin.*]

[*Doctor and Harlequin smile; only Capitan seems resentful.*]

[*The King laughs with elegant heartiness.*]

Pierrot. It is two years and a month ago.

Maddox. Sir?

Pierrot. Since I laughed. [*Stepping down.*]
By the way let us all three exercise our imaginations and pretend for a while that I am not the King. It will be so much simpler.

Maddox [*simply*]. It will.

Pierrot [*to Susan*]. Take my throne, madam.
[*Susan obeys.*] I will recline at your feet.
[*Does so.*]

Maddox [*to the King*]. Well, old man. I suppose I've made three enemies. But I had to do it.

Pierrot. You have made one,—Capitan. But you have only to wipe your boots on him and you'll suddenly find he's a doormat, with 'welcome' written all over him. Capitan can't see a joke—that's why I appointed him Marshal of the Mob. He's about the only man on this island who

has no sense of humour; so of course he's very precious. Doctor and Harlequin were intensely amused and will be your admirers for ever.

Maddox. Then I'm sorry I let them in for those lashes.

Pierrot. You haven't, dear boy,—you flatter yourself. Certain financial transactions will pass between them and the executioner, and they will return with a stamped official document certifying that they have been lashed; but they won't have been lashed. And if Doctor and Harlequin don't get their money back from the Executioner over some other job within a week from this date, then I am not Pierrot the Thirtieth. That's how this country is run. What are you dreaming about—er—Susan?

Susan. I was only thinking, my pale Pierrot, how convenient it would be to have one husband with a strong sense of humour and another with none at all. It would be the salvation of marriage, I do believe.

Maddox. Be quiet, Sue. [*To King.*] I suppose it's never occurred to you that this is no way to run a country.

Pierrot. See here, my English friend. For the moment I don't want you to treat me as the King; but on the other hand I don't want you to treat me as a perfect ass. *Of course* it's occurred to me that this is no way to run a country. It keeps on occurring to me, every minute

of every day, that this is no way to run a country. Nothing else ever does occur to me. The damned thing has given me nervous dyspepsia already. And what's more, I'm the sole man in this city to whom it *has* occurred that this is no way to run a country. The sole man! But what am I to do? I'm only an absolute monarch. If I were to breathe a single suggestion for altering the present system I should get myself locked up for a lunatic and there would be a Council of Regency in no time. I repeat—what am I to do? [*Mad-dox shakes his head.*]

Susan. Couldn't there be a revolution? I should have loved a revolution. Oh! But Capitan says the people are perfectly happy. What a pity, isn't it?

Pierrot. Capitan is magnificent, but a donkey. They are all donkeys. The diet of this city ought to be carrots. But the greatest donkey of all is the mob. I sympathise deeply with the mob—because it is so intensely stupid—so stupidly unaware of its own power. And yet I am beginning to doubt whether after all it *is* quite unaware. I have just returned from a royal progress in the industrial north. I was received everywhere with acclamation. My state coach was drawn by human beings who uproariously insisted on being draught animals—probably by arrangement. But in reality the north is a mass of dangerous discontent.

Maddox. How do you know? Kings never know anything.

Pierrot [*mysteriously*]. I had means of knowing.

Susan. Then there really may be a revolution after all! Hurrah!

Pierrot [*rises*]. Hurrah, certainly. But I might be hanged.

Susan. I was forgetting.

Pierrot. Yes, but *I* wasn't. Listen, friend sailor. You say you're a realist.

Maddox. I positively am.

Pierrot. Then I take it you've not risen from the mob.

Maddox. I positively have not.

Pierrot. What made you a realist?

Maddox. Merely my commonsense.

Pierrot. How odd!

Maddox. Why?

Pierrot. I'm affected with just the same kind of commonsense, that's all. And the state of affairs here offends my commonsense. I want a change.

Maddox. You'll have one pretty soon, whether you want it or not.

Pierrot. You speak as a realist?

Maddox. Yes.

Pierrot. Blood?

Maddox. Yes.

Pierrot. Necessarily?

Maddox [*hesitating*]. N-no. Realism might conceivably avoid blood.

Pierrot. I agree. And I'll make you an offer. Leave the island if you like—I shan't stop you—but why not both of you stay and help me to bring about a bloodless revolution—a revolution from the top? Obviously you're both as clever as monkeys.

Susan. Oh! Jim! Let's.

Pierrot. I'll promise to take your advice.

Maddox [*grimly*]. Well, it's nearly equal to suicide, but I'll take a chance on it.

[*Columbine appears at back.*]

Susan. Who's that?

Pierrot. Who's what? [*Perceiving Columbine; excited, but trying to hide his excitement.*]
Oh! That's the dawn-dancer.

Susan. But it was dawn ages ago.

Pierrot. This is the official dawn. She has to perform the dawn-dance every morning. [*Getting impatient suddenly.*] Now you must be very tired after your shipwreck. You ought to bathe and change and eat. Take this ring; go through the gate; you'll see two fellows in blue. Show them the ring and tell them to lead you to the royal guest apartments. Order what you like. You will get it.

Susan [*taking ring*]. Thanks very much. . . . But I thought that the dancers were hereditary.

Pierrot. So they are. They're the most im-

portant caste in the kingdom, and the legislative chamber consists exclusively of dancers—male of course. Good-bye for the present. [*Moving towards gate.*]

Maddox [*as he goes*]. Why should the hereditary legislators be dancers?

Pierrot. Hereditary legislators have to be something. In your country, I gather, they're rent-collectors. In mine they're dancers. Always have been.

Susan. But she doesn't look very hereditary. She looks like a girl of the people.

Pierrot. Well, she isn't really hereditary. She's what's called a stipendiary dancer. She dances in the place of a Countess aged eighty-eight who can't dance and never could.

Maddox. No matter how old they are, our hereditary legislators can always collect rents.

Pierrot [*still drawing them impatiently towards the gate*]. Yes, England is a great country.

Susan. But she isn't dancing. She gave a few pirouettes and now she's stopped. She's eating a bon-bon.

Pierrot. In theory she's dancing. [*In another tone.*] The proposed revolution will alter all that—alter all these foolish customs. Well, see you soon. There's one of the blue fellows [*indicating an official within the gates*].

Susan. But—

Pierrot [*royally impatient*]. I am not accustomed to argue.

Susan [*curtsying*]. Sorry, sire.

[*Exeunt Maddox and Susan.*]

Pierrot [*calling*]. Columbine! [*Columbine looks round, startled.*] Come to me.

Columbine. We should be seen.

Pierrot. I will lower the awning. [*Does so.*]
Come.

Columbine. [*Coming.*] I am afraid.

Pierrot. It suits you.

[*She embraces him behind the awning with passion.*]

Columbine. I have not finished the dance.

Pierrot. You have not begun it. You cannot dance.

Columbine. Ah! I need encouragement. Without encouragement I can do nothing. My sister Isabella is not like that. She dances in spite of every discouragement—and even punishment.

Pierrot. Yes, from what I saw of her she is a born dancer. You are not.

Columbine. Do you love me?

Pierrot. In my fashion.

Columbine. If one is in love one can tell lies when necessary.

Pierrot. True! The fact is, you dance beautifully.

Columbine. I'm so glad.

Pierrot. You're a born dancer. You're the finest dancer in the world.

Columbine. You don't *really* think so.

Pierrot [*blandly*]. Of course I do or else I shouldn't say it. [*Columbine kisses him. He continues, but now with intense conviction.*] And you are the most beautiful woman in the world.

Columbine. You made me beautiful.

Pierrot. Not a bit. You were beautiful when I first set eyes on you.

Columbine. It was in that moment that I became beautiful. No woman is beautiful until she is seen. When I washed dishes in the kitchen of the Second Administrator of the North no one looked at me and saw that I was beautiful. And so I had no beauty. Then you glanced up at the garret window, where I was watching the royal progress, and I was transformed. You are my creator.

Pierrot. I've made a goddess. Tell me, what is your dream?

Columbine. I dream always of your daring, which snatched me from the slavery of the house of the Administrator, and brought me here in secret, and gave me pretty clothes and jewels and three servants and had me taught English, and caused me to be appointed dancer of the sacred dance of the dawn. Oh! Lion! Oh! Serpent! Oh! Fox!

Pierrot. But what is your desire? It shall come true.

Columbine. My desire is to be in a garden, where the nights are as warm as the days, and the moon always rises when the sun sets. And in the garden is a very deep well.

Pierrot. What is the well for?

Columbine. To throw all the dirty plates and dishes into; so that I shall never have to wash plates and dishes any more. And I must never have to dance any more, either, or do anything at all. Because there will be only you and me in the garden. And I shall sit quite still all the time, and hold your hand, and look into those eyes that created me, and love you.

Pierrot. But you'd be bored after about twenty years of that.

Columbine [*passionately*]. Never! [*A pause.*] That is my dream.

Pierrot. It's the dream of many women. I will give you a better dream.

Columbine. Beloved, there is no better one.

Pierrot. Yes. I will marry you, and you shall be the Queen.

Columbine. Me? The dishwasher?

Pierrot. Yes, and we will have a deep well in the state dining-room.

Columbine. But your other wife?

Pierrot. I have no other wife.

Columbine. But you will have. They will make you. It is the law.

Pierrot. Oh well! Anything will do. I'll marry one of the assorted Princesses that are lying about.

Columbine. No, no! Not a Princess.

Pierrot. Not even an old Princess?

Columbine. No! Not a Princess. Because when we met she would always look at me as though I was a dishwasher. You must marry a widow with fifteen children, and she must be the daughter of a sub-minor-official of the tenth class. And she must be old and fat and ugly and disagreeable, and absorbed in her litter. And she must have very bad health which compels her to live always in the mountains. It is necessary that the air of the city should be fatal to her.

Pierrot. I consent.

Columbine [*relieved, grateful, and embracing him*]. Ah! My knight! My king! Tell me no more, or I shall die in your arms of happiness. [*In a different tone.*] But yesterday you said it was impossible for you to marry me, or to marry any woman not of the official class. You said it was against the law.

Pierrot. So I did. But the law will be altered. Lots of laws will be altered. There's going to be a revolution in Caspo.

Columbine. A revolution! Has my father been talking to you?

Pierrot. He has not. I have never had the honour of meeting your respectable father. I know nothing of him except that he is the leader of the industrial agitation in the north—and the origin of the loveliest creature in existence. No! The suggested revolution will start from the top. It will be a revolution without blood. I shall run it myself, at a minimum of expense and noise, with the help of two distinguished foreigners who happen to be on the island.

Columbine. But why do you want a revolution?

Pierrot. I want it because I am an honest man—almost—and I wish to be a righteous king. I was appalled by the conditions of existence in the industrial north.

Columbine. Oh! Man! Oh! Child! Oh! Self-deceiver! If you hadn't fallen in love with me you would have forgotten all about the conditions in the industrial north by this time. It was only the conditions of *my* existence which troubled you. It was only the horrible tales of the north from *my* voice that awoke your conscience.

Pierrot [*in an outburst*]. Women are terrible! They are the damnable looking-glasses in which men see themselves—not what they think they are, but *themselves*. You are right! You are hellishly right. If I hadn't fallen passionately in love with you the industrial north wouldn't have cost me a wink of sleep. And here I was inno-

cently taking myself for an honest man. Ha-ha! Ha-ha!

Columbine [*soothing him*]. Great child! What has come over you? What have I said? Give up your little revolution and everything will be well. I should hate you in a revolution.

Pierrot. But it's all arranged for. It's promised.

Columbine [*stamping her foot*]. I know what it is. It's those foreigners. [*Tyrannically.*] Well, you must cancel the order—that's all.

Pierrot. But what about the industrial north? There's bound to be trouble there.

Columbine. Oh! Simpleton!

Pierrot. And what about your father, the great champion of the oppressed?

Columbine. Oh! Simpleton! There's a much easier way than a revolution. Any woman could tell you.

Pierrot. What is it?

Columbine. Raise my father to the official class, and give him a sinecure at Court. . . . [*She walks about.*] No revolution then—and we should all be together.

[*Enter Pantaloon.*]

[*Disguised in an official Court cloak, he comes round the awning and surprises the King and Columbine.*]

Pierrot. My friend, I do not recognise your important face; but I notice that you are wear-

ing one of the forty three kinds of uniform that were abolished by the Court Costume Office last month. Moreover nobody except the Dawn Dancer and possibly myself has the right to be alive here at this hour. If the Court Master catches you—

[*Pantaloön throws off his disguise.*]

Columbine. Father!

Pierrot. Is it Pantaloön, the leader of the north? This anxiety for your daughter's welfare does you much credit. Well, I was just arranging a rather brilliant future for her.

Pantaloön. The north is on fire.

Pierrot. Run back and put it out.

Pantaloön. Nothing will put it out except the blood of the official class.

Pierrot. You don't mean to say that the mob has had the wit to make a revolution of its own? I've been unjust to it. It's not so stupid as I thought it was. Well done, mob!

Pantaloön. I have made the revolution. I've been working it for years. I've educated myself for it. I even learnt English for it, at the risk of ten years imprisonment. I hold the mob in my hands. To-day I took my life in my hands—

Pierrot. You seem to have quite a lot on your hands this morning.

Pantaloön. I have risked my life to save you.

Pierrot. That is very noble of you, Pantaloön.

But isn't it rather illogical? A revolutionary trying to save his chief enemy?

Pantaloon. You are not our chief enemy. The official class is the chief enemy of freedom, and it will be exterminated. But you are different. I can save you and I will. I know you are sympathetic to the mob. The mob likes to look at you. And you have been very kind to my misguided daughter.

Pierrot. Not misguided—guided.

Columbine. Father, he is an angel.

Pierrot. A figure of speech, Pantaloon.

Columbine. Save the King, father.

Pantaloon. I will save him if he will follow my plan.

Pierrot. What is it?

Pantaloon. Declare a democratic constitution. Institute a franchise. And—

Pierrot. And—

Pantaloon. Make me your Prime Minister. I'll perhaps even save a percentage of the official class, temporarily, just to give me a few wrinkles about administration.

Pierrot. My friend, it has pleased heaven to make you a fool. I regret to have to say it of your daughter's father, but you are a fool. I agree with you that the official class is your chief enemy. It is also mine. But what do you suppose the official class will be doing while you are making a revolution? The official class is numer-

ous. It is well drilled. It is disciplined. It has exclusive possession of all weapons, and particularly of the new bows and arrows. Arguments in favour of human liberty are beautiful and intoxicating things. But very fragile. In the last resort there is only one argument, and it always settles the—er—altercation. That argument is organised force. Your mob won't have a chance against the official class.

Pantaloon. My followers have obtained possession of the Arsenal, including all weapons, and particularly the new bows and arrows.

Pierrot. Really?

Pantaloon. It was my first stroke.

Pierrot. Well, Pantaloon, you may be a fool; you probably are; you almost certainly are. But not so intense a fool as I thought.

Pantaloon. Sire, you are generous. Accept my plan, and you will soon see that I am not a fool unrelieved. I will promise you a bloodless revolution.

Pierrot [*after a pause*]. No. I abdicate.

Pantaloon. You don't mean to say that you will voluntarily give up the throne.

Pierrot. Not merely voluntarily, but gladly. Believe me, Pantaloon, it is no catch, my job. I shall abdicate for four reasons. First, I am bored. Bored. *Bored.* And always should be. Lying is an excellent pastime in moderation, but I have to lie always and it is tedious to the last

degree. No revolution could stop lying. Then all these ceremonies. Ceremony is admirable; but not for sixteen hours a day, seven days a week. You saw my late royal progress. You'll scarcely believe that a royal progress is the most exquisite form of torture yet invented: but so it is. Take another detail. I'm not allowed even to put my own shirt on. The boredom of having your shirt put on for you by two other human beings is simply excruciating. Well, that's my first reason. The second reason is that I'm not really sympathetic towards the mob at all. I'm only sympathetic towards your daughter. She was just telling me so when you arrived, and the truth was a great shock to me. The third reason is that if the mob has got hold of the new bows and arrows you can't fulfil your promise of a bloodless revolution. That dream is over. I know mobs and I know arrows. Blood there must be. I don't like blood, and I'll go. The fourth reason is that I've been offered a much better situation. A young lady is going to hold my hand for twenty years in a beautiful garden where the moon rises as the sun sets and where there is no washing up. . . . [*Columbine takes his hand.*] You see, it's begun already. No, Pantaloon, I leave everything to you. Doubtless your political scheme is arranged to the last detail. Well, carry it out. There will be no opposition from me. You have an opportunity unique in the annals of the universe. Take

it. . . . But yours will be the responsibility.

Pantaloon. I was hoping that your Majesty would remain King. Then, if you married my daughter, as of course you would—

Pierrot. Ah! You are shrinking from the responsibility of your revolution.

[*Enter Maddox and Susan, with Harlequin.*]

[*The latter is gesticulating with servile admiration to Maddox.*]

Pantaloon. Your decision is final.

Pierrot. As final as death. But before I leave I will help you. [*To Maddox and Susan.*] My dear foreign friends, during your absence a somewhat rapid revolution has actually occurred in this kingdom. I am no longer the King. There is no King. I am about to retire with this lady to a softer climate. Here [*indicating Pantaloon*] is the gentleman in charge. He has the vast majority of the citizens behind him. He has all the weapons in the island at his disposal. And I feel sure that he is full of beautiful ideas. But he has had no practical experience and he needs expert help. You are English and therefore you understand politics. You mean to adopt a political career. Adopt it in Caspo.

Susan. Oh, Jim!

Maddox [*hesitating*]. Yes. Very jolly. But—look here, you know. We've absolutely no knowledge of the Caspo system and the Caspo mentality.

Harlequin. Pardon me. May I suggest myself in this little affair. [*To Maddox.*] You are the most brilliant man I ever met, and I have met all the brilliant men of my generation. You are cleverer than I am. I admire you enormously. Now, nobody knows the Caspo system and mentality better than I do. The Court is in my pocket; and yet I am a man of the mob. Such a combination will never occur again. I offer myself, Mr. Pantaloon. With this dazzling gentleman and his sister and myself to aid you, you can successfully turn the island upside down in about a day and a half. I guarantee it. I could say more but won't.

Pierrot. The solution is obvious. Make Harlequin, my ex-valet, President of the new commonwealth. I'm off. [*He moves away with Columbine. Susan turns with admiration to Harlequin.*]

CURTAIN

ACT II

Eighteen months have passed.

Isabella and Susan have entered to Harlequin, who is seated on the throne in the garden. Harlequin wears an exaggeration and intensification of the Pierrot costume.

Susan has a new costume showing an intensification of the modes of Caspo.

Harlequin. You are late, Isabella. It is now ten and a half minutes past nine on the day of my first grand Presidential ball—

Isabella [to Susan, pointing to Harlequin]. See this miraculous clock. It represents a man, tells the half-minutes, the minutes, the hours, and the days; chimes whenever you look at it; and predicts the past with great certainty.

[Susan makes a smiling gesture of protest against this freedom.]

Harlequin [to Susan, apropos of her protest]. I should think so, indeed! *[To Isabella.]* Madam, I will not stand this behaviour. I am the President of Caspo, and as the first dancing mistress in the republic you know as well as anybody the ceremonies with which I ought to be approached.

Isabella. I do. And what then?

Harlequin. You ought to, must, and shall observe them.

Isabella. I thought that all that funny royal circus business was abolished when Pierrot abdicated and married my silly sister Columbine.

Harlequin. I represent in my person the dignity and grandeur of the entire republic.

Isabella [*with a facetious obeisance, which Susan more soberly copies*]. Sorry! [*She laughs.*]

Harlequin [*severely*]. You find it droll?

Isabella. Not in the least. But I happen to laugh like that sometimes. It's my own mouth, you know.

Harlequin [*smiling grandiosely*]. Tut, tut! You are a girl.

Isabella. What presidential insight you have!

Harlequin. Now let us begin. [*Stands.*] I sent for you because I have decided to honour you by allowing you to teach me the very latest steps, caprices, hesitations, reverses, and poses for my magnificent presidential ball to-night. First you shall illustrate your doctrines in the person of Susan.

Isabella [*taking a paper from her stocking*]. First, you shall read this.

Harlequin [*reading the paper*]. 'To account rendered. 375 harlequins. Terms net cash.' What is this?

Isabella. It isn't a sonnet to your manly beauty. It's a short description of what you owe me for the dancing lessons I gave you last year. What's more, it's the seventeenth description of the kind that I've had the happiness of delivering to you.

Harlequin. But this is monstrous!

Isabella. It is. It can't go on any longer. The final hour has struck, O clock! Pay me—in gold. You don't imagine that I can teach dancing to the dignity and grandeur of the entire republic for nothing.

Harlequin. You have the inexpressible honour—

Isabella. Honour won't buy silk stockings, and if I ate it at night I should go to bed hungry. And I'll tell you another. The price to you of my dancing-lessons has risen a hundred per cent this minute. The price of everything else has risen a hundred per cent since you began to represent in your person the dignity and grandeur of the entire republic, and the price of my dancing-lessons to you has now followed the general example. There's a great deal too much dancing in this sublime country.

Harlequin. You say that! You who once begged humbly for a position as teacher of dancing at my Court! You who were born for dancing. You who live by dancing!

Isabella. Live by dancing! I'm dying by danc-

ing. I've already given five lessons to-day, and no breakfast yet. Yes, I'm a professional dancer. But that doesn't stop me from seeing that since the new laws made dancing legal for the common people, the entire republic has gone dancing mad. And you and the ministers encourage it for your own purposes, because you think it diverts the attention of the mob from your rotten and mischievous muddling. There's only one honest soul among you—and he isn't a minister.

Harlequin. You mean myself. You are forgiven.

Isabella. I don't. I mean James Maddox, Susan's admirable brother. Ah! He is a *man*.

Harlequin. Then you insinuate that I am a rascal.

Isabella. I don't insinuate at all. I state it.

Harlequin. This is too much.

Isabella. I had a sort of idea it would be.

Harlequin. You will be flung into prison immediately. [*Raises his hands.*]

Isabella. Wait a moment. You are going to clap your hands for the guards.

Harlequin. That is my intention.

Isabella. Well, change it. I assure you that within an hour of me being 'flung' into prison, you'll be 'flung' off that tin throne of yours.

Harlequin. By what process, may I enquire?

Isabella. Last night I was elected chairman of

the Women's National Party. It's the strongest party in the country, and if anything happens to its chairman something with finger-nails in it will happen to the government of Caspo. You and your ministers are the most hopeless bunglers that ever made a mess of this island. What have you done? You've taught everybody to be idle and you've taught everybody to dance. And you've practically put an end to marriage. Not one of you has taken the trouble to get married, even for the sake of example.

Harlequin. Girl, have you forgotten that your own father is Prime Minister?

Isabella. Father—father's a widower. He's done his share. And moreover you've all misled father.

Harlequin. Come, come, girl. Compose, tranquillise, and behave yourself. Let us dance.

Isabella. I won't. And I never meant to. I came here like an ultimatum.

Susan. Oh, Isabella.

Isabella. Yes, I did. And I'm going to summon a meeting of our organising committee at once. I don't mind telling you what our programme is:—Less dancing, more work—and more marriage.

[*Exit Isabella.*]

Harlequin. Did you notice how quiet I was?

Susan [*sympathetically*]. So unlike yourself, President.

Harlequin. You also were not absolutely loquacious.

Susan. There was nothing to say.

Harlequin. Then you think she was right?

Susan. Alas.

Harlequin. She was wrong when she said she came here like an ultimatum. It was much more like a cyclone. She has left behind her a track of desolation and the fragments of a man. I ought to be swept up.

Susan. President, you behaved magnificently, in most trying circumstances.

Harlequin [*brightening*]. Well, perhaps I did. Now I come to think of it, I did.

Susan. I never admired you more. But you must have a policy, and you must act on it. I needn't tell you what that policy is.

Harlequin. No, of course you needn't. What is it?

Susan. Listen. Isabella said that the Women's Party was the strongest party in the country. It is. By the way, I've been appointed General Secretary to it.

Harlequin. You!

Susan. Why not?

Harlequin. But you're so womanly. I never met a woman so truly feminine as you. And yet you've allowed yourself to be made Secretary of the Women's Party!

Susan. You see, I joined the party so that I

could influence it, moderate it, keep it as far as possible out of mischief. And you must do the same as I have done. You must ally yourself with the Women's Party.

Harlequin. You forget that I am President of the Republic, and therefore can ally myself with no party.

Susan. I know your perfectly splendid impartiality. But you can ally yourself to the Women's Party without doing the slightest damage to that impartiality.

Harlequin. How?

Susan. By marrying. You would renew the fashion for marriage, which is the chief plank in the Women's Party platform. And the party would be won.

Harlequin. Brilliant! I say and I repeat, without fear of contradiction, brilliant! It's as brilliant as if I'd thought of it myself. But who am I going to marry?

Susan [*with false casualness*]. Oh! That doesn't matter a bubble—except of course to you. Marry somebody. Marry anybody. Marry one girl, and you're saved. Marry a couple, according to the ancient Caspian law, and you're settled in the Presidential chair for life. That's certain.

Harlequin. I'm so out of practice that I shouldn't care to begin with two marriages at once. One would be enough for a start.

Susan. Quite.

Harlequin. Ah! What a pity I can't marry the General Secretary of the Women's National Party!

Susan. Who says you can't?

Harlequin. But—

Susan. You delicious old silly!

Harlequin. But you belong to the English governing class and I am only a v—

Susan [*stopping his mouth*]. Hsh! The word begins with P-Pr-President.

Harlequin. So it does. [*They embrace.*]

Susan. Harly, shall you think me unwomanly if I tell you something?

Harlequin. The answer is in the negative.

Susan. I've always adored you—from the first moment I saw you. Remember?

Harlequin. I've never dared to adore you. But I shall begin forthwith, instantly, immediately. [*Kneeling.*] I've begun. Susan, what can you see in me?

Susan. Adventure! Romance! There's a lot of women like me in England. They want to *live*. They'd do anything to be *alive*. I'm *alive* now!

Harlequin. Let us start right off. We'll be married this afternoon. To-night you shall shine and glitter as the hostess at the Presidential Ball. The Secretary of the Women's Party the wife of the President! That will give my rascals of Ministers something to think about—and Isabella

too! As President, with you by my side, I can manage Caspo.

Susan. You're too modest.

Harlequin. Not really!

Susan. You're too modest. Caspo is no place for you. It gives a man like you no scope.

Harlequin [*grandly*]. Possibly not. But Caspo's the only place there is. This island is all Caspo.

Susan. Darling, there is England. England is your spiritual home. My dream is to see you in English politics. With your extraordinary elasticity, your adaptability, your genius for opportunism, you were born to be the Prime Minister of Great Britain. And you will be.

Harlequin. But I'm not English.

Susan. That's nothing; they seldom are. We will have such romance, such adventure, that—

[*Enter Pierrot and Columbine. Pierrot is pushing a perambulator.*]

Harlequin. Excuse me. I must have a word or two with this—er—fellow. [*He quickly takes his official seat.*]

[*Susan moves discreetly away.*]

Harlequin [*stiffly*]. Good morning, Mr. Pierrot. We have not had the pleasure of seeing you for quite a long time.

Pierrot [*bowing*]. No, Mr. President. If I remember rightly the last time we were alone together you had the misfortune to hand me a clean

stocking with a big hole in the heel. No doubt an oversight. In fact you profusely apologised.

Harlequin [*with a difficult smile*]. We are not alone together now. I sent for *you*, Mr. Pierrot. I did not send for your family.

Pierrot [*courteously*]. True, but my family just happens to be here. That's all. The fact is, I never travel without it. In these days I prefer always to keep a personal eye on my family.

Harlequin. Do you mean to suggest, my good man, do you mean to imply, hint, signify or convey that public security is not maintained in the republic?

Pierrot. I mean to suggest, hint, imply, signify, or convey nothing whatever, my august old friend. I merely state, affirm, declare, assert, profess and predicate a purely personal preference touching my family.

Harlequin. Approach.

[*Susan is now inspecting the contents of the perambulator with Columbine, R.*]

Pierrot. Your Presidency is most gracious.

Harlequin. I wish to speak to you about a few matters which ought more properly to be discussed in the criminal court, but out of regard for your fallen grandeur I have thought it fit and kindly to deal with them in a less formal manner. You are a man of sense.

Pierrot. Your Presidency flatters me. How-

ever, I admit that my wits are not in a sling.

Harlequin. Why do you persist in wearing the Presidential costume? You know it is an offence against the Republican code.

Pierrot. But these are my own clothes.

Harlequin. They are too much like mine.

Pierrot. But I wore clothes like these many years before your Presidency deigned to wear them, if I may say so.

Harlequin. You may not say so. You wore such clothes when you were head of the state. You are no longer head of the state. You are nobody.

Pierrot. If I went naked I fear that your police would soon decide that I was somebody. And I have no other clothes. Your Presidency may remember that by permission of the National Assembly I took away three suits from the Palace wardrobe. This is the last of the three, and my poor wife has already had to mend it. [*Indicates a patch.*]

Harlequin. Buy some more clothes, and different ones.

Pierrot. I wish I could. But the fabulous rise in prices, coupled with the absurd unwillingness of respectable tailors to accept your beautiful new republican paper money instead of old-fashioned gold—

Harlequin. Enough! Do as I say.

Pierrot. I will do what I can. I may add that

I should be only too delighted to change my style of suit.

Harlequin [*suspiciously*]. Ah! Why?

Pierrot [*with a glance*]. Because it has been rendered ridiculous.

Harlequin. Ha! By whom?

Pierrot. Ha! That I cannot say. Has your Presidency any other recommendations for me?

Harlequin. I have another matter and a still more serious one.

Pierrot [*with humour*]. Impossible!

Harlequin. I learn that at the General Election you did not vote. The duty of every citizen is to go to the poll, and exercise the most precious privilege of democratic citizenship. Voting indeed is made compulsory by law. Why did you not vote? Were you ill?

Pierrot. Not a bit.

Harlequin. Then what prevented you?

Pierrot. My sense of humour, I suppose.

Harlequin. Your sense of humour?

Pierrot. My sense of humour, aroused no doubt by the recent sublime invention of what your people are pleased to call the party machine.

Harlequin. Your sense of humour, my friend, may lead you to the scaffold one of these days. [*With a kind of appeal.*] Surely you, Mr. Pierrot, with your historic past, might set a better example to the inexperienced citizen of a young and struggling republic.

Pierrot. Of course if you put it like that—

Columbine [*to Susan*]. I'm so glad you think his royal highness has a good constitution. Sometimes a child so handsome as mine—

Harlequin [*starting up, furious*]. 'His royal highness!'

Columbine [*obstinately*]. The Crown Prince.

Harlequin. What do you mean, woman?

Columbine. Well, he's the son of the King, I hope. You can't alter that with all your republics.

Harlequin. I shall tell your father, the Prime Minister.

Columbine. Oh! Go along.

[*Enter Capitan, excited.*]

Capitan [*flourishing a newspaper*]. Really, old man, I must—

Harlequin [*firmly*]. Good morning, my dear Capitan. You are, I believe, the Minister of Public Order, and yet you enter the Presidential presence in this disorderly, uncereemonious and perspiring manner.

Capitan. Pardon, your Presidency. National considerations of extreme urgency.

Harlequin. The greatest national consideration is public order. Let this be a lesson to you. What is it?

Capitan. This newspaper ought to be suspended at once.

Harlequin. Not so fast, Capitan. Personally

I object to the newspaper. It is inconvenient, but in suspending it we might antagonise more interests than we should placate. What is the matter this morning?

Capitan. The damned rag—

Harlequin. The rag, Capitan, merely the rag.

Capitan. The rag says that the banished Official Class has dared to emerge from its exile in the Central Forests and is marching on the city.

[*Harlequin starts.*]

[*The baby crows very happily (if possible).*]

Harlequin [*to Columbine*]. Take away that damned baby.

Pierrot. The baby, my dear President, merely the baby. I wish your Presidency a respectful good-bye.

Harlequin. Stay. I may—er—want you. [*To Susan.*] And you too, admirable and lovely lady.

Columbine [*with her head in the air; to the baby*]. My Prince!

[*Exit Columbine, proudly, with perambulator.*]

Harlequin [*to Capitan*]. But this so-called news about the Official Classes marching on the city is absurd.

Capitan. Quite absurd.

Harlequin. The details?

Capitan. The Official Classes are alleged to have issued a manifesto to the people of Caspo, if you please. [*Reads.*] ‘Having learnt of the

disastrous confusion into which the civil life of Caspo has fallen, owing to a lamentable combination of amateurishness and corruption hitherto unknown in the annals of the kingdom'—the 'kingdom,' mark you, not the republic!—'we have decided to return to the city in order to resume our labours for the benefit of the body politic. We have taken this decision solely in the interest of the commonweal, and at considerable personal sacrifice, for we have established in the central forests a community in which the summit of human happiness has already been almost attained,' Almost! 'We may add that if any attempt is made to oppose our passage we shall meet force with force, and, convinced as we are that the vast mass of enlightened public opinion is with us, we have no doubt whatever as to the final result.' Ha-ha!

Harlequin. But is this true?

Capitan. Perhaps not. And if it is not true, what can be the object of the newspaper in printing it?

Harlequin. Let us perpend. Let us reflect. Let us, in a word, cerebrate upon the matter. The newspaper belongs to the capitalist owner of all the cotton mills in the north—

Susan. My brother always warned you against retaining the capitalists.

Capitan [*angry*]. Madam!

Harlequin. My dear Minister, you are speak-

ing to my future wife, the promised spouse of the President of Caspo.

Capitan. Good God! [*A pause.*]

Harlequin [*calmly*]. Let us assume that the news of the raid is true.

Pierrot. Well, of course it's true.

Harlequin. How do you know?

Capitan. Are you in the plot? [*Threateningly.*]

Pierrot. Plots are no longer in my line. Nowadays I would as soon be in prison as in a plot. But the news is all over the island.

Harlequin. Then why didn't you tell me instantly—when you came?

Capitan. Yes. Or you might have come to *me*. Why didn't you?

Pierrot. Could it have crossed my mind, even in a nightmare, that there was anything that you didn't know, Minister Capitan?

Harlequin. Assuming the news to be true, these rebels must be ruthlessly shot, mowed down, harvested.

Capitan. They shall be. Trust me. Only a set of clerks and inky-fingers could have dreamed of fighting my forces without weapons.

Pierrot. The story—no doubt absurd, but still the story one hears—the story is that out of the wood of the forests, the feathers of the birds in the forest, and the iron from their saucepans and cart springs, the Official Classes have manufac-

tured a kind of bow and arrow far superior to anything hitherto known. Even the new arrows of last year but one are entirely outclassed. You see they are not all inky-fingers. They have among them the finest weapon-experts in the country. [*To Capitan.*] You do not blench? You are not afraid?

Capitan [*feebly forceful*]. I am afraid of nothing.

Pierrot. Except danger.

[*Enter Doctor.*]

Doctor [*excited, but somewhat cynical*]. Good morning, my dear President. Naturally the Prime Minister is not here.

Harlequin. He is not. Is anything amiss?

Doctor. Oh! No! Nothing. Only I've been looking for him everywhere. I thought it might interest him as Prime Minister and Chancellor of the Exchequer to know that an event of some slight interest has happened in the north.

Capitan. You don't mean to say that the raid of the Official Classes has actually arrived in the north.

Doctor. Oh! That's a trifle. I know all about that.

Capitan. Oh, indeed! You call it a trifle!

Harlequin. Speak, my dear Minister of Health and of the Fine Arts. What is it?

Doctor. Merely a general strike. That's all.

Harlequin. A general strike!

Doctor. A general strike. The whole of the industrial north! Both in the Government factories and in the private factories! They want another twenty-five per cent rise in wages. They are great on logic in the north, and they allege that as prices are still going up, wages must still go up. It appears that the final stroke is the last rise in the price of dancing lessons. The Director in Chief of the Government factories would have given way, but the cotton manufacturers would not give way. Negotiations were broken off at two o'clock this morning, and a general strike declared at once.

Capitan. But the paper said that the employés were practically beaten and everything would be settled.

Doctor. That is exactly what the paper would say, simpleton.

Harlequin. But what does the thing mean?

Doctor. It means revolution and the overthrow of the Government, and no doubt a certain amount of blood.

Harlequin. Our overthrow? Our blood?

Doctor. Assuredly.

Harlequin. Ah, well! It mustn't mean that. It really mustn't. Let us perpend, reflect, and cerebrare. Let us remember the motto which I caused to be carved on the walls of the supreme Council chamber: 'There is always a way out.'

[*Enter Pantaloon, unkempt. He bows hastily and clumsily to Harlequin.*]

Doctor. At last, my dear Prime Minister. Doubtless you have been engaged with your chiropodist or your manicure or your hosier. It is a beautiful morning, a beautiful morning. Probably you've heard all about the general strike in the north.

Pantaloon. I have, sir. [*Doctor is rather taken aback.*] But that is a trifle. That is a matter for Capitan. I have news much more serious.

Harlequin. Then the island of Caspo is gradually sinking into the sea. It can only be that.

Pantaloon [*without humour*]. I don't understand your Presidency. As islands don't float they can't sink. My information is that the whole of the new Civil Service has just struck. Administration is at an end.

Susan. This is the first good news we've heard to-day.

Pantaloon [*angry*]. Woman!

Capitan [*aside to Pantaloon*]. More delicacy, Mr. P.M. [*To Pantaloon and Doctor.*] She is going to marry the President.

Pantaloon. Well, he can have her.

Harlequin [*to Susan*]. Dear lady, will you be so good as to go to your dear brother James and bring him here at once? We may need him. In fact, we positively shall.

Susan. With pleasure.

[*Exit Susan, curtseying ironically to Pantaloon.*]

Harlequin. Now, Prime Minister. This Civil Service affair.

Capitan [*sarcastically*]. Something to do with dancing, no doubt.

Pantaloon. Yes, sir. Something to do with dancing. [*To Harlequin.*] Your Presidency may not know—I bother you as little as I can with details—that thirty thousand men Civil Servants were recently appointed to cope with—to cope with—

Pierrot. The damned idleness and incompetence of the rest.

Pantaloon. To cope with—er—the situation. So far so good. But it was found, after the appointments had been ratified, that we were short of exactly thirty thousand stools for them to sit on. Some delay has occurred over the contract for stools. Indeed it's not yet quite settled. In the meantime, as they could not work, the thirty thousand demanded the right to employ their spare time in dancing.

Harlequin. The two sexes together?

Pantaloon. Yes.

Harlequin. The old story! The old story!

Pantaloon. Some jack-in-office refused the Civil Servants' demand.

Doctor. Dancing counts among the fine arts, and I am the Minister of Fine Arts. I refused it.

Capitan. Quite right too.

Pantaloon. Well, you see now what you've done. The whole body of new Civil Servants have suddenly made common cause, all grades, all sexes. This morning the Government offices are empty, and the state is at a standstill.

Doctor. And so here we are!

Harlequin [*quietly*]. Now, my friends, naturally the full Cabinet of Ministers will meet at noon. But as the inner Cabinet consists of you three gentlemen, and as the custom is for the inner Cabinet to settle all really important matters in advance, perhaps it would be well if you got to work immediately. The situation, if I may so express myself, seems to demand a certain amount of despatch. [*A silence. Harlequin looks round the Ministers.*] Far be it from me to venture to suggest any procedure to your graces. I reign, but do not govern. I have no responsibility. The responsibility is solely yours. Whatever government falls, whatever government rises, whatever blood is shed, I shall continue to reign and continue not to govern,—unless of course some of the blood to which I have referred happens unfortunately to be my blood. Now, my dear Prime Minister, your policy!

Pantaloon. I—I—[*pause*].

Harlequin. I perfectly understand you. You mean that we need not take the affair too seriously. I agree. If we take it calmly, quietly,

with tranquillity, applying to it our plain commonsense—I mean yours—we shall find the way out which unquestionably exists. I understand our dear Prime Minister to imply that the demand of the Civil Servants must be granted. Once more I agree. Is it not better that the thirty thousand who for the moment have nothing to sit on except what nature gave them—is it not better that they should indulge in the healthful and elegant pastime of dancing than that they should waste the precious hours in melancholy idleness and back-chat against the Government? The demand must be granted, and it must be explained that the previous refusal of the right to dance was due to a slip of the pen, a slip of the tongue, a slip of anything. I see that I am voicing your views—and not least those of the Minister of Health and Fine Arts.

Doctor. Quite so! Quite so!

Harlequin. Now with regard to the other thing—what was it? Oh, the general strike in the industrial north. Well, the features of the Minister of Public Order clearly indicate that the workers' request for an increase of twenty-five per cent ought to be acceded to. There is, as one of you very ably said a few minutes ago, logic in such a request. Wages must keep pace with prices. Obviously.

Pantaloon. But even if we agree for the Government factories, the capitalists who own the

private factories won't agree. And all the workers are solid together.

Harlequin. A most just observation. The workers do stand solid together, and I admire them for it. But I need not point out to you that there is a way—there is always a way—of persuading the capitalists to yield. Increase the price of their contracts with the Government. And if necessary give them a monopoly or so into the bargain.

Pantaloön. And how is the Government to pay more to the workers and more to the capitalists as well? Where is the money to come from?

Harlequin. My dear Prime Minister and Chancellor of the Exchequer, you are joking—I am glad to see it, for you joke too rarely. The money will come from the printing-press. We must print more bank-notes. The solution is simplicity itself. The republic is young. It must go through its teething, its measles, even its whooping-cough. But all these little troubles will gradually pass.

Capitan [*naïvely*]. Seems quite simple.

Pierrot [*coming forward*]. Everything seems simple to simpletons. But when you've printed more money prices will rise again, and there will be a fresh rumpus about wages and a worse one. And so it will go on. [*Laughs.*] Everything seems simple to simpletons.

Pantaloon. I should like to know what my son-in-law is doing here.

Harlequin. A disciplinary matter, now over. I ordered him to remain, thinking he might just possibly prove useful to us.

Pierrot. Well, I am proving useful. And I'll be still more useful, perhaps, in pointing out that you've entirely forgotten to deal with the armed raid of the banished Official Classes.

Harlequin [*slapping his knee*]. I knew I'd forgotten something.

Pierrot. While you're babbling their army is getting nearer every minute.

Doctor. I wonder how long Maddox will be.

Capitan. Maddox! Maddox! Maddox is the cause of all the trouble. Who insisted that the mob should be allowed to dance? Maddox!

Harlequin and Doctor. Maddox!

Capitan. Who insisted that the mob must be allowed to learn English? Maddox!

Harlequin and Doctor. Maddox!

Doctor. Who showed the mob how to form Trades Unions? Maddox!

Harlequin and Capitan. Maddox!

Doctor. Who argued for universal franchise, male and female? Maddox!

Harlequin and Capitan. Maddox!

Harlequin. Who first mentioned the weapon of the strike? Maddox!

Doctor and Capitan. Maddox!

Pantaloon. Who first talked about a daily paper? Maddox!

Harlequin, Doctor and Capitan. Maddox!

Pantaloon. Who refused to agree to the whole of the Official Classes being taken out to sea and drowned? Maddox!

Harlequin, Doctor and Capitan. Maddox!

Capitan. Our first step is to execute Maddox.

Harlequin. Do you really think so?

Doctor. Why! Of course!

Harlequin. I was only thinking he is about to become my brother-in-law.

Doctor. But surely you would not allow personal considerations—

Harlequin. Of course not! Of course not! I could send my carriage to his funeral, couldn't I?

Capitan [*wildly*]. Down with Maddox.

[*Enter Maddox and Susan. A silence.*]

Maddox [*grimly*]. What's up?

Harlequin [*effusively*]. My dear fellow, we need you. We need you.

Capitan [*fawningly*]. When you hear all the facts of the situation—

Maddox. You can't tell me anything I don't know.

Doctor. We have followed your advice, and look at the result.

Maddox. You haven't followed my advice.

Doctor. But really—

Maddox. Look here, do you want to know what particular brand of idiots you are?

Harlequin. You express yourself badly, sir, but—

Maddox. But I get there. Well, you are popularity hunters. That's your brand of idiocy.

Capitan. Us? Popularity hunters?

Maddox. You wanted to drown all the Official Classes. Popular move. Your notion was to scrap all the machinery of the state. I objected. You compromised. You merely exiled the Official Classes. Not so popular, but still popular.

Pantaloon. We were just debating what to do with the raiders.

Maddox. Waste of time. The question isn't what you'll do with the raiders. It's what they'll do with you. I've just heard they're within fifteen miles of the city. They've got the goods, just as you had eighteen months ago, Pantaloon. Remember? Can't argue with the latest bows and arrows. They pierce your intestines.

Harlequin. You are right. But you put it—shall I say—rather crudely.

Maddox. I do.

Harlequin. The matter is complicated by the unfortunate strike of the new Civil Servants.

Maddox. It isn't. The raiders will soon settle that strike for you. Half a dozen of their latest arrows will fix it in no time. You'll see.

Harlequin. Most true.

Maddox. Strike about dancing, indeed! And you'd let them dance, would you? More popularity-hunting. Of course the dancing question is political. I know that. Dancing was a privilege of the official classes. Therefore in creating the new heaven and the new earth you ordained dancing for all. What rot! You ought to have forbidden dancing to everybody. When you've granted the vote to every man and woman in the country you don't want to set 'em dancing. You want to make 'em work and think. But you did the popular thing. And what's the result? Dancing means new clothes and laxity for all. New clothes and laxity mean extravagance. Extravagance means going to bed late and less marriage. You had the finest possible marriage system in this country. Every husband looked after by two wives, and every wife looked after by two husbands. Ideal! The mainstay of morality. And you've practically killed it.

Harlequin. Most true.

Maddox. Nothing is more prejudicial to the institution of marriage than ball-rooms.

Harlequin [*to Ministers*]. Yes, and you've antagonised all the decent women in the country. The Women's National Party is dead against you.

Maddox. I should say it was. I was talking to Isabella last night. Now there's a woman for you—or rather a man! More sense than the lot of you put together.

Harlequin. I may state that I have been thinking very seriously of this marriage question. An illustrious example is necessary. I have decided to marry your amiable sister, who happens to be the secretary of the Women's Party.

Maddox [*coolly*]. The devil you have!

Harlequin [*advancing to Maddox*]. Pardon me, your coat-collar is not quite straight. [*Puts it right with a valet's expertness, then returns to his seat.*]

Maddox. Thanks. And I suppose you have been discussing the general strike in the North?

Doctor. The matter has engaged our attention. Some outpouring of your wisdom would be esteemed.

Maddox. More fruit of popularity hunting. I advised you to give the beggars an eight-hour day. But no! The old Official Classes always had a six-hour day, and so everybody must have it. A popular stroke! Oh! Very popular! Well, the work isn't being done. The commodities aren't being produced. Prices go up. Wages go up. Gold vanishes. Paper money abounds. Food doesn't. The administration of the state is in the hands of a lot of damned amateurs. It's inefficient and it's costly. Budget's risen three hundred per cent. Everybody gets nervous. Prices go up again. Then, inevitably the general strike. Bound to come. You're fools. You

aren't absolutely rascals. Some of you are thieves of course. But that's human. On the whole I daresay you mean well. Only you're suffering from the terrible disease that attacks nearly all politicians.

Harlequin. You don't mean—

Maddox. I mean the delusion that you're indispensable. You desire the happiness of the people, but you've jolly well decided that the happiness of the people has got to come through you or not at all. . . . So now you know.

Doctor. Very interesting, my dear Maddox. But you're merely destructive. What would you propose to *do*?

Maddox. Propose to *do*. Why, it's as clear as daylight. [*Slowly and with emphasis.*] Let 'em have their general strike. Don't give way. Tell them you'll see them in Hades before you give way. A month of general strike is just what this island needs to bring it to its senses.

Harlequin [*to the Ministers*]. He is absolutely right.

Doctor [*to Maddox*]. But there may be trouble—grave trouble.

Maddox. There positively will be. But the only way to cure a country of lunacy is to let it run up against facts. A general strike will soon teach the populace a thing or two about political economy. There'll be a devil of a mess. But afterwards you'll see a decided improvement.

Doctor. Conceivably though, we shan't be here to see it.

Maddox. Most probably not. Still, there's just a chance one or two of you *may* survive.

Pantaloon. This proposition is monstrous! Monstrous! It shows a callousness which is perfectly disgraceful. The general strike must be stopped at all costs.

Doctor. Of course it must.

Capitan. Most decidedly.

Maddox [*casually*]. All right! [*He turns away.*]

Harlequin. Where are you going?

Maddox [*stopping*]. Your decision is final?

Pantaloon. Yes.

Maddox. Then I'm merely going. Sure my collar's quite straight, President? [*Harlequin bows.*] Thanks. By the way, you're wrong in saying you'll marry my sister.

Harlequin. Why?

Maddox. Because you won't. I shan't let my sister marry a valet—I beg your pardon, an ex-valet.

Susan. Jim—

Maddox. Shut up, Sue.

Susan. I will not. You talk like this to me—you, a convinced feminist, a strong advocate of equality between the sexes!

[*The three Ministers talk together.*]

Harlequin. I am President of the Republic.

Maddox. Possibly. But you'll always be an ex-valet, whatever else happens to you.

Harlequin. You—a democrat!

Susan. Jim, I insist—

Maddox. Shut up, Sue, I tell you. I'm head of the family. People like us don't discuss family affairs in public. [*To Harlequin and Susan.*] I may be a convinced feminist and I may be a democrat. But a line has to be drawn somewhere. I've drawn it between you two.

[*Exit Maddox.*]

[*Harlequin and Susan embrace.*]

Doctor [*to Harlequin*]. Pray forgive me for interrupting your august Presidency, but while you and Miss Maddox are engaged in the performance of these most interesting manœuvres, the raiders are advancing upon the city.

Harlequin. True. Nevertheless, the proof of good government is in individual happiness. I am happy. Hence the government, at any rate my share of it, is good.

Pantaloon [*savagely*]. Why did you agree with him?

Harlequin. With whom?

Capitan. Maddox.

Harlequin. I didn't agree with him about my marriage.

Capitan. Your marriage be damned.

Harlequin. Capitan! Capitan! In the presence of a lady! It is just this lax attitude

towards marriage which leads nations towards disaster.

Doctor. You agreed with him on the general situation and the policy to be pursued. You said he was absolutely right.

Harlequin. Because he *was* right.

Pantaloon. But not ten minutes ago you had suggested a policy utterly different.

Doctor. Suggested it, if I may say so, with really brilliant persuasiveness.

Harlequin. Ah! *Then* I was trying as well as I could to express the views of my Ministry.

Pantaloon. Then have you no convictions of your own?

Harlequin. Certainly not. My rule is always to do what seems best at the moment. This rule is obviously incompatible with convictions. Would you have me do what does not seem best at the moment? Of course you would not. Then why ask me if I have convictions? Convictions are worse than inconvenient, they are tedious. . . . So are you.

Capitan. You agree with this Englishman, and yet you allow him to insult you.

Harlequin. Pardon me. I allow nobody to insult me. It is not a question of allowing. If any one chooses to try to insult me, that's his affair—not mine. The excellent Maddox was misled by his perhaps excusable prejudices into employing

language which some might have regarded as unseemly. Am I responsible? As a matter of fact I am incapable of being insulted. I never have been insulted. I do not permit myself to be insulted. I have no susceptibilities. I have only interests.

Pierrot [*advancing after a stroll up stage*]. The raiders are advancing.

Capitan [*drawing his sword*]. The truth is this fellow [*indicating Harlequin*] is a traitor in our camp. He belongs to the proletariat.

Pantaloon [*resentful*]. I belong to the proletariat. But that man does not.

Susan. Of course he does not. He is a gentleman—by nature. [*To Capitan, simply.*] Put up that sword. [*Capitan hesitates. Susan puts the sword up for him.*]

Pantaloon. He belongs to nothing. He wormed himself into the Presidency on the ground that he represented both parties. The man who represents both parties represents neither.

Capitan. True.

Harlequin [*to Capitan and Doctor*]. And how did *you* worm yourself into the Ministry? And *you*?

Pierrot. The raiders are still advancing.

Doctor. Dear friend, you forget. Mr. Maddox insisted on our joining the Ministry in order to maintain the continuity of tradition.

Capitan. Certainly.

Harlequin. Well, maintain it. I'm not the Executive.

Pantaloon. One thing is certain. We can do nothing until Harlequin does one thing. And he won't do it.

Harlequin. What ought I to do?

Pantaloon. Resign, of course. With you out of the way, we can begin.

Harlequin. Me resign?

Pantaloon. I told you he wouldn't.

Harlequin [*calmly*]. I resign with great gladness. Believe me, Pantaloon, it is no catch, my job. In the first place it's an awful bore being President with a Ministry such as you've given me. And in the second place, I get nothing out of it. No—may I use the word—pickings! [*Sadly.*] And I was so used to pickings at one time. Maddox mentioned thieves. I name no names. But it is a fact that you're very rich, all of you, whereas I'm very poor. You've all built new and gorgeous palaces, whereas I'm heavily in debt, and the Presidential palace still has no bathrooms. I resign. If you like I'll be a Minister—Minister of the Way Out. And which of you will be President?

Pantaloon [*flabbergasted*]. Yes, which of you will be President? You, Doctor?

Doctor. I do—not—think!

Pierrot. Now don't look at *me*. I won't have it.

[*The Ministers look at each other.*]

Susan. Harly, you are sublime. [*In a loving whisper.*] We will escape from the island together and you shall conquer England.

[*Enter Isabella.*]

Isabella. Now you people—

Pantaloon. Child!

Isabella. Prime Minister, will you please understand that I am not your child—

Pantaloon. This is the first I have heard of it. Would you slander your dead mother?

Isabella. Don't be silly. For present purposes I am Chairman of the Women's National Party and you are Prime Minister. [*With a gesture.*] Be silent, all of you. There is not a moment to spare. My Committee has held its meeting. Naturally, being women, we have got the latest news. And the chief news is that the various insurgents—the raiders, the workers in the north, and the new Civil Servants—are all willing to compromise. Of course they talk big, as men always do; but we women know the inside facts—trust us—and we suspect that a compromise can be arrived at and the country saved.

Capitan. I felt sure it was all bluff.

Isabella [*bows*]. Well, you ought to know. You are probably the greatest authority on bluff that ever existed.

Capitan. Madam!

Isabella [to the others, calmly]. A compromise can quite possibly be arrived at. *But—*

Doctor. But! The most dangerous word in the English language.

Isabella. Only on one condition. Namely, that Mr. Maddox is appointed President. [*Murmurs.*] Mr. Maddox belongs to the English ruling class, and he has both the power to command and the sense to choose the best ministers. He is liked by the banished Official Classes because he opposed their banishment. He is liked by the industrial north because they know that he was the real author of all the new political reforms. He is not liked by the new Civil Servants, but they do not count. He inspires general confidence because he is the only honest man among you, and has never sought power. [*Murmurs.*] He is the darling of the Women's Party because he is a feminist and a strong advocate of marriage, and good-looking and brutal.

Doctor. But—

Isabella. Doctor, I am surprised that you should use such a word. As Minister of Fine Arts you ought to issue an abridged edition of the dictionary from which this dangerous word has been eliminated. There is no 'but.' Accept the offer or refuse it—at once. Take it, and you have peace. Refuse it, and you have scarlet revolution. What does the President say?

Harlequin. I say 'accept.' And all the more so as I have already resigned the Presidency.

Isabella. You have resigned!

Harlequin. I was asked to do so, and I am nothing if not patriotic. Moreover—

Susan. Harlequin and I are going to get married, darling Isabella.

Isabella [*agitated*]. You have deserted me, darling Susan?

Susan. Could you think it, dearest creature? I am utterly yours—and Harlequin's.

Isabella [*recovering herself, to the Ministers*]. Then you all agree to the appointment of the new President?

Pantaloon [*glumly*]. I suppose so. [*The others nod.*]

Pierrot. But supposing he declines. He isn't what I should call putty, or even wax.

Isabella. I have already seen him. He accepts. He will be here in a moment. [*After some hesitation.*] There is one more point. The Women's Party makes it an absolute condition that the new President shall marry the Chairman [*with a glance of triumph at Susan*].

Doctor. You?

Isabella. Me. It is a state measure, and more than anything else will contribute to the tranquillisation of the country. Indeed, is it not clear that a state whose principal article of faith is marriage cannot be presided over by a bachelor?

Doctor. Well, I'm not sure.

Pierrot. Have you broken the news to him?

Isabella. I have not told him.

Capitan. You ought to tell him at once.

Isabella [*maidenly*]. It is not for me to tell him.

Pierrot [*to Capitan*]. Coarse brute! Of course it is not for this lady to tell him. Harlequin, as the ex-president, must tell him, and Pantaloon, as the father of the prospective fiancée, must speak in support.

Isabella. Of course. [*With a smile of thanks to Pierrot.*] Mr. Maddox will naturally propose to me.

Harlequin. He shall. . . . By God, he's here!

Isabella. I'll come back in a few minutes.

[*Exit Isabella.*]

[*Enter Maddox.*]

Harlequin. Welcome, Mr. President Elect.

Pantaloon, Doctor and Capitan. Welcome.

Maddox. Then you think I ought to take on this job?

Pierrot [*after a pause*]. Oh! They do! They do!

Doctor. We are delighted to know that at last you are prepared to accept a certain amount of responsibility. It is not too soon.

Maddox. Well, I don't want to, and that's flat. But the arguments of Isabella were so convincing, so unanswerable—I always told you that she had

more statesmanship than any of you, didn't I?

Doctor. Oh, you did!

Maddox. She's a *man*, if you like.

Harlequin. Ah! But she has charm, great charm, more than any *man*.

Maddox [*carelessly*]. Yes, of course.

Harlequin. In fact, she's the perfect woman.

Pantaloon. I'm her father and so it's not for me to speak. But she *is* the perfect woman.

Maddox [*carelessly*]. I suppose she is.

Harlequin. I take it that marriage is still one of the principal planks if not the principal plank—in your political platform?

Maddox. The institution of marriage—yes.

Doctor. All is for the best. You are in favour of marriage, and you have the perfect woman.

Maddox. What do you mean?

Doctor. Naturally you will marry Isabella, of whom you have always spoken so very highly.

Maddox. Marry her?

Doctor. Of course. In the millennium which is about to open the President must of necessity be a married man. Didn't Isabella tell you?

Pierrot. My dear Doctor, how could that sweet retiring nature tell him? You must not expect impossibilities.

Maddox. But who wants me to marry her?

Harlequin. Everybody. The Women's National Party insists on it. Indeed I may go further and say that without this marriage there

can be nothing but revolution, anarchy, and the slaughter of the innocent. This marriage is a state measure. It will combine the highest patriotism with the highest degree of conjugal felicity.

Maddox. But I've never thought—

Doctor. Ah! That is your English way. But permit us all to remind you that by the lavishness with which you have scattered advice over this country you have incurred a very grave responsibility. This country owes its present serious position to none but yourself. You can save it—and you can save it by merely following your inclination. Never was a great statesman so fortunately placed.

Pierrot. The raiders are advancing.

Harlequin [to *Maddox*]. Your sense of duty—

Doctor. Coupled with your sense of pleasure—

Maddox. Yes, I see. Quite! Quite!

Harlequin. Then you will ask the hand of this incomparable lady?

Maddox [grimly]. Yes, yes.

[*Enter Isabella.*]

Harlequin. Here she comes.

[*All retire except Maddox and Isabella.*]

Isabella [in her usual positive manner]. Ah! So you are alone.

Maddox [trying to be nice]. Apparently.

Isabella. I should say, *we* are alone.

Maddox. Yes, that is more correct.

Isabella. I'm so glad you've consented, so very glad.

Maddox. Consented to what?

Isabella. To—er—take up this appointment. You are the ideal man, and you will make an ideal country out of Caspo. You'll be firm. You'll choose the right ministers. You'll direct them wisely. You've got the Women's Party solid behind you. The situation is terrible, but you will save it, and you'll save Caspo.

Maddox [*with difficulty*]. Yes. Now about the situation. Seems to me it's threefold—triangular, as you might say. I should like to discuss it with you, if you don't mind. There is nobody in this country who has a better grasp of political realities than you have.

Isabella. You're flattering me.

Maddox. Indeed I'm not.

Isabella [*beginning unconsciously to be seductive*]. Well, all I can say is that your praise gives me more pleasure than anything else ever did in the whole of my life. I don't mind telling you that I've heard before, from others, what you think of me, and I could scarcely believe it. But now that I hear it from your lips—

Maddox. Oh, not at all! Now the most important angle of the triangle is undoubtedly in the industrial north, isn't it?

Isabella. There's one thing I ought to tell you.

Maddox [*alarmed*]. Yes?

Isabella [*sincerely*]. I'm a very complex woman.

Maddox. All women are. . . . All men too. Now as regards the industrial north—

Isabella. But I'm really very complex. You might think—most people do—that I'm a purely professional woman, interested in dancing professionally, and still more interested in politics.

Maddox. But you are, aren't you?

Isabella [*with real conviction*]. Oh, quite! But there's another woman in me. I daresay I seem hard and unemotional, and perhaps overbearing—what they call unsexed. But that's not the real me a bit. The other woman is the real me. I don't as a matter of fact care a fig for politics; nor for dancing, except for my own pleasure. The truth is I'm domestic at heart. What my secret nature demands is a home, an interior, and a man whom I can obey. Yes, obey. You're very curt sometimes; harsh, brutal. It's just at those moments that I've especially admired you. [*Softly.*] The hardest men are always the most tender.

Maddox. Really?

Isabella. Well, of course! Didn't you know? Naturally you didn't! You powerful dominating men never understand yourselves. At bottom you're too modest.

Maddox. I hate introspection.

Isabella. Oh! So do I. [*Exotic Caspian music sounds off.*] What's that music?

Maddox. I haven't the least idea.

Isabella. I know. It's the band rehearsing for the Presidential ball to-night.

Maddox. It'd better stop. There won't be any Presidential ball to-night. There can't be.

Isabella [*pleadingly*]. But there must be. The Presidential ball will be the symbol of the opening of the new era which you will have inaugurated. And you will dominate it, while I— [*Listens to the music.*] Do you recognise it? Do you recognise the tune? [*She dances.*]

Maddox. No, I can't say I do. Now it occurs to me that if we semaphore up to the north a proclamation that is at once firm and placatory—

Isabella [*coming close to him as she dances*]. We shall dance this to-night at the ball, you and I. Do you know the steps? Come and try it with me? [*She opens her arms.*]

Maddox. It's—it's too fast.

Isabella. So it is, if you say so. I'll tell them to play slower. [*She runs to the side of the garden.*]

[*Enter Pierrot.*]

Pierrot [*to Maddox*]. The raiders are getting nearer.

Maddox. Let 'em.

Pierrot. Have you proposed?

[*The band plays more slowly.*]

Maddox [*in an outburst*]. No! And I'm hanged if I *can*. I'm not the marrying sort. I'm a bachelor by birth and inclination. Women are all right in the abstract, but I will not marry. I won't marry anybody, least of all one of these complicated women that want to run the show one minute and be thrashed the next. I shan't ask her to marry me, and your potty little country can go to hell. Let her be her own president.

[*Isabella, who has re-entered, sinks brokenly on the throne.*]

CURTAIN

ACT III

Three months have elapsed.

Enter Isabella, followed by Pantaloon, Doctor and Capitan, with an Attendant carrying a bandbox.

Doctor. Now, Miss President of the Island of Caspo, if your Presidency can spare a few moments of your august existence—

Isabella. One second, please. Give me time. The figures were only announced five minutes ago, and I'm not quite ready—

Doctor. Shall we retire and return?

Isabella. Not at all. Henceforth I belong to the public, and I suppose you are part of the public. You shall not be shocked.

[The Attendant has opened the bandbox and taken from it a mantle whose design and colouring recall the Pierrot costume. Isabella puts it over her shoulders, motions the Attendant to depart, and mounts the throne.]

[Exit Attendant.]

Isabella [settling herself]. Now, my friends.

Doctor [smiling]. Your Presidency had prepared this cloak in advance of the result?

Isabella. What's that got to do with you, may I enquire?

Doctor. Oh, nothing! Nothing.

Isabella. I made it myself, anyhow! And I presume I had the right to prepare for the best as well as for the worst?

Doctor. Oh, assuredly! Assuredly! And it's delightful to see that even in the Presidential chair you have not forgotten the instincts of your sex.

Isabella. Oh, is it! Well, I suppose you've come to hand me the resignations of the Cabinet?

Doctor. But how did you guess?

Isabella. It's usual and proper, isn't it, on these occasions? Anyhow, if you hadn't resigned I should have asked for your resignations. [*She holds out her hand.*]

Doctor. As Secretary to the Cabinet I prepared the document ready to hand to whoever might be elected. I hereby deliver it—of course purely as a matter of form. I am all in favour of adhering strictly to form.

Isabella [*taking the document negligently*]. Oh! So am I! Thanks. [*At a loss where to put the paper, she screws it up and sticks it into her girdle.*]

Doctor. I say purely as a matter of form.

Isabella. Oh! Quite purely. Anything else?

Pantaloon [*angrily*]. Bella, when is this going to stop?

Isabella. This what?

Pantaloön. This foolery.

Isabella. What foolery?

Pantaloön. Yours.

Isabella. Sir!

Pantaloön. Please remember that I'm your father.

Isabella. I daresay you're old enough to be my father, and so I shall treat you indulgently. But I've told you once before that you aren't my father here. I'm the President of the Republic, and you—well, a minute ago you were Prime Minister, but as you've resigned you aren't even that now. You aren't anybody at all.

Pantaloön. But this is ridiculous. It seems only yesterday that you used to wash my shirts.

Isabella. Please don't rake up these old family scandals.

Pantaloön. Now look here, girl. I can see a joke as well as anybody.

Doctor. Yes, we can all see a joke.

Capitan. I can't. Never could.

Pantaloön. You've had your joke. You've shown what a democracy will do when it loses its head. You've got yourself, a mere girl, elected President. But you don't mean to say you aren't going to resign at once.

Isabella. What about equal rights for men and women?

Pantaloön. There are limits.

Isabella. You're one of those democrats that

want all the democracy for themselves ; that's what you are. Please don't let me detain you. I'll send one of my secretaries round to see about the shirts.

Pantaloön. Then you won't resign, and you throw me out?

Isabella. Not at all. You resigned of your own accord. It was very thoughtful of you, I must say.

Pantaloön. I had only two children and I was too easy with them. One ran off with a King and then married him. And as if that wasn't enough the other took to dancing. And as if *that* wasn't enough, she went and became President of the Republic. And me a democrat and all! What would your poor mother have said?

Isabella [*rising*]. Father?

Pantaloön. Nay, nay! I'm not your father. I'm nobody at all. When I began my fight for the working-man I thought I should have the proletarian state all in running order in about a fortnight. That was twenty years ago. And we've got no further than a petticoat gallivanting over every one and everything. This country's gone wrong. I don't know what I'm saying.

Doctor. Forgive me, old friend, you aren't saying anything. You're simply making a noise like a man of fifty. I know how you feel. I felt the same at your age. You'll get over it.

Isabella. But, father, can't you see I'm only

carrying on your work? [*She comes down from her seat.*]

Pantaloon [*waving Isabella away*]. I should think better of you if you were carrying on your own work—instead of trying to *preside*.

Capitan [*to himself*]. Shirts! Shirts!

[*Exit Pantaloon.*]

[*Isabella makes an appealing gesture towards him as he goes. Then returns to her seat.*]

Isabella [*recovering her equanimity; archly*]. For devastating family life there is nothing like politics.

Doctor. True! True!

Isabella. Except perhaps a legacy left to the wrong person.

Doctor. True, true! I perceive, Miss President, that you are a woman of the world. May I suggest, therefore, that we indulge in a little realistic conversation, now that your father is gone. Nature has ordained that realism between parents and children is impossible.

Isabella. By all means let us be realistic.

Doctor [*clearing his throat*]. Do you seriously believe in this democracy business? Now—realism.

Isabella. I don't know—yet.

Doctor. Because you democrats have been at it for a considerable number of months, and the results in actual felicity are not very apparent.

Isabella. Well, you aristocrats were at it for a considerable number of centuries and the results in actual felicity were still not very apparent when we took charge. If they had been, we shouldn't have bothered to make a revolution. Now—realism.

Doctor. Er— [*Turning to Capitan.*] What do you say to that, Capitan.

Capitan. I never argue. It doesn't suit me.

Isabella. Moreover, Doctor, I am surprised that you should have asked me such an extremely silly question. Unless of course you take me for an idiot.

Doctor. Miss President, you are the cleverest woman in all Caspo.

Isabella. Why do you waste the time of the cleverest woman in all Caspo asking her whether she believes in democracy. You might as well ask her if she believes in the spring floods. Democracy's *here*, whether anybody believes in it or doesn't believe in it. It may be very inconvenient for some of you, for all of us, but it's come to stay. Those who won't have it had better go and bury themselves.

Doctor. Tut-tut! Don't let us carry realism to extremes, my august lady.

Isabella. Any other question?

Doctor. I had another question, but—but—

Isabella. Out with it, in the name of realism!

Doctor. Do you sincerely believe in government

by women? I admit the question is a little awkward—perhaps indelicate.

Isabella. Not at all awkward. But what's the matter with government by women?

Doctor. We cannot yet be sure. The general view is that a woman's brains—

Isabella. Look here. Are you going to say that I haven't got more brains than Capitan?

Doctor. I wouldn't dream of saying such a thing. But woman has a different *sort* of brain.

Isabella. From Capitan's? I should hope so. Speaking broadly and in the abstract, as there are more women than men on this island, it seems to me only democratic that women should do a bit of governing for a change.

Doctor. Madam, women have always governed in reality, and they always will.

Isabella. You mean their mysterious home influence over their husbands and sons, and all that kind of thing?

Doctor. Precisely. Men may take decisions in the Council-house, but they absorb the pure milk of the word—if I may use a noble English phrase—in their home.

Isabella. No doubt. But they spill so much of the milk on the way from the home to the Council-house that we women have decided to carry it there ourselves in future.

Doctor. Madam, let us get back to realism. Let us get back to realism. Looking all the facts

of life in the face, do you intend to govern entirely without men?

Isabella. Of course not. Co-operation is essential. Women demand men before they demand anything.

Doctor. Then you will marry at once. Realism, my dear lady, realism.

Isabella [*repulsed*]. My marriage will be my affair alone.

Doctor. It cannot be. 'More marriage' has always been the principal item in your party's programme. Hence you yourself must marry, as you have so strongly advised others to do. But the marriage of a President is far more than a union of hearts—it is a political crisis of the first order. You agree?

Isabella. It might be.

Doctor. Good. Now, Capitan.

Capitan. Madam, I have a proposal to make. To cut a long story short, will you marry me?

Isabella. To cut a long story short, do you love me?

Capitan [*apathetically*]. Madly.

Isabella. Your passion positively thrills me. And I admit I'm rather tempted to respond to it—

Capitan. Ah! [*Flattered.*]

Isabella. Because if I married you I could pay you out nicely for the way you treated my class when you were Marshal of the Mob. And I would, too!

Doctor. Dear lady, do not dig into history. Capitan is no longer Marshal of the Mob. He is a lover.

Capitan. So I am. I'm young—youngish. Women tell me I'm handsome. I've great physical strength. I'm an aristocrat. I'm thoroughly accustomed to politeness and public life. And last but not least, I'm not overdone with that quality which a woman like you would detest in a husband.

Isabella. What's that?

Capitan. Brains.

Isabella. I grant all this, Capitan. [*Oratorically.*] You may be young. Women may tell you you're handsome. You may be very strong and an aristocrat, and thoroughly accustomed to public life. And you may have little brains—or even none. In brief a perfect character! [*Lightly and quickly.*] But I couldn't stick a man like you in my house.

Capitan. Death and pestilence! She's still in love with that fellow Maddox. It was he who gave her the idea of being President. And by God it was he who got me those ten lashes when he first landed here; I'll cut his ears off!

Isabella [*angrily*]. Will you!

Doctor. Be magnanimous, Miss President. Pardon the excusable outburst of a disappointed lover. I felt sure Capitan was destined to a refusal. I guessed that you would prefer the spiritual charm to the physical. But as he is the

younger I thought it only fair to you, as a young woman, that he should begin. Will you marry *me*?

Isabella. Do you love me?

Doctor [*with enthusiasm*]. Madly! Hopelessly! I mean hopefully. Very hopefully. And I beg to announce that I possess two great advantages over Capitan. First, my former position as Guardian of the Hereditary Dancers gave me a profound and comprehending sympathy with women.

Isabella. I do believe I *will* marry you—

Doctor. Ah!

Isabella. Just to punish you for the profound and understanding sympathy that you wreaked on some of the poor, defenceless, sweated dancers from the north who were my friends. However. No! I'll spare you.

Doctor. I have another advantage.

Isabella. Is it possible?

Doctor. Though still fairly lively, I am old. You would soon be a widow.

Isabella. Am I to be realistic?

Doctor. Please.

Isabella. Then you make me sick, both of you.

Capitan. Death and pestilence!

Doctor [*to Capitan*]. Hsh! That's not at all a fair description of us.

Isabella. Do you imagine I can't see through your dodges? You think that if you married me

you could ruin my cause while pretending to help it. You just can't do it. If you were the last two men on the island, and I was the last woman, I'd—[*lightly*] throw myself into the sea and marry a shark. And anyhow I've something more important to think of than a husband.

Doctor. There is nothing more important than a husband.

Isabella. Oh! Yes, there is. There's my programme.

Doctor. Your programme!

Isabella. My political programme.

Doctor. But, madam, you must entrust the political programme to your ministers.

Isabella. I shall. Only it will be my programme.

Doctor [*shocked*]. But really! Really! A President cannot have *views*.

Isabella. I can.

Doctor. A President is the figure-head.

Isabella. Do I look like a figure-head? Now, do I?

Doctor. A President is the symbol of impartiality.

Isabella. Impartiality be damned! You make me tired. Do you suppose I've put myself to the trouble of fighting this presidential election in order to perch on a tall chair and smile? [*Imitates the conventional smile.*] I intend to run this nation.

Doctor. But such a thing has never been heard of in a democratic constitution.

Isabella [*more calmly, with charm*]. It's going to be heard of, anyway. I wonder why men are so absurdly unpractical. After all, I'm the President I suppose.

Doctor. Apparently.

Isabella. Well then, I'm going to *be* the President. I've the right to choose my Prime Minister, and before I choose him he will have to swallow my programme. Yes, and digest it, too.

Doctor. Government will be quite exciting work.

Isabella. It will.

Doctor. Without indiscretion, may one enquire roughly what your programme is?

Isabella. Certainly one may. There's no secret about it. Item one. No more double marriages. No more two husbands and two wives. The old system was all very well for people who hadn't anything else to do but be married; but it's too exhausting to people who work. Moreover it was man's invention and in practice it proved very unfair to the wives, men being what they are. One husband one wife in future.

Doctor. 'Men being what they are.' That means alienating the whole adult male population—

Isabella. Item two. No more paper money.

Doctor. But, august lady, this is appalling!

Have you grasped all the complications of the currency question?

Isabella. I'm a woman and I've grasped this: if you go into a shop to buy a pound of butter it costs you twice as much when you pay for it in paper money as it does when you pay for it in silver money. No more paper money!

Doctor. But you will throw hundreds of printers out of work.

Isabella. Let them marry dairy-maids and learn to make butter. Item three. No more public dancing until production has increased fifty per cent and prices have fallen fifty per cent.

Doctor. A detail! It only means alienating everybody male and female between the ages of sixteen and thirty.

Isabella. Item four. An eight-hour day for everybody.

Doctor. Including the Official Classes?

Isabella. Including the Official Classes. They've come back to work, and they *shall* work.

Doctor. But the hours of the Official Classes have *always* been six hours a day—from ten to four.

Isabella. With two hours and a quarter for lunch. The darlings! Item five—

Doctor [*to Capitan*]. Where are you going?

Capitan. To bury myself.

Doctor. One moment. We will occupy the same grave. [*To Isabella.*] Item five?

Isabella. Item five and last. Education for all classes.

Doctor. But we brought that in under your illustrious predecessor Harlequin, over a year ago.

Isabella. Yes, and it's been a perfect farce. I mean *real* education.

Doctor. *Real* education! Capitan, run along and prepare that grave. Madam, be warned. I have studied deeply the files of the English *Morning Post* and my conclusion is that the downfall of England began with the Popular Education Act of 1870. Is not the mob discontented enough and inquisitive enough and pernicky enough already?

Isabella [*obstinately repeating*]. I mean real education, by real teachers, whose salaries must be twice the salaries of Cabinet Ministers, because—er—

Doctor. Continue. Don't stop, for heaven's sake!

Isabella. Because the work of teaching the young is twice as important as the work of Cabinet Ministers.

Doctor. Well, Miss President, good-bye. See you in the next world. [*Turning again, and speaking grimly for the first time, and with a menace that gradually increases.*] But let me tell you that you don't understand anything about

government. Have you ever met an average individual? Don't you know that the mob hates work, hates education, hates discipline? Don't you know that it consists almost exclusively of selfish, stupid and grasping persons? Above all, don't you know that it is incapable of gratitude and always wants a victim? *You* will be the next victim of the mob—unless the Official Classes get up a conspiracy to overthrow you: which the Official Classes most positively will. [*Capitan nudges him to keep quiet.*]

Isabella [*daunted*]. A conspiracy to overthrow me?

[*Enter Susan (in her original English costume) and Harlequin (in a suit of Maddox's).*]

[*Exeunt Doctor and Capitan.*]

Susan. We worked our way in, thanks to dear Harlequin's palace-knowledge. May I—now you're such a swell? [*Susan and Isabella embrace fondly.*] Why, my beloved big-wig, you're all trembling!

Isabella. Am I?

Susan. Happiness, I suppose. Triumph. Ecstasy. All that sort of thing. My darling girl. Fancy you beating the poor dear ex-King in the election for President! I do congratulate you on it all. [*They embrace again.*]

Harlequin. So do I. But is it the President or is it the Republic of Caspo that ought to be con-

gratulated, felicitated, embraced? One cannot embrace a republic, but one can kiss, fondle and caress the hand of a great lady [*kisses Isabella's hand*].

Susan. How clever he is, isn't he?

Isabella. But what is the meaning of these clothes?

Susan. Oh! That's a spare suit of Jim's. I've altered it to fit him. And I've gone into my old frock. Because we're leaving for England, you know, and though they'll stand nearly everything in England they won't stand queer clothes.

Isabella. Leaving for England?

Susan. Yes, to-night. We just looked in to say good-bye.

Isabella. But—

Susan. I'll tell you—and of course you'll keep it to yourself. Jim's had his wireless working for a fortnight. He got into touch with a British cruiser—third class, but still it'll do. It's lying-to seven miles off, beyond the shallows. Our own boat is quite in order, and he's managed to sneak another boat out of the National Museum. I regret to say one can still do a lot with bribery in this beautiful country of yours, my sweet President. Harlequin and I are going off in the first boat, and as soon as Jim's had the signal that we're on board the warship, he will dismantle his wireless and get away in the second boat. There's no moon and nobody will see anything, except the

cruiser's searchlight which will guide us to the ship. All Caspo will be wondering what on earth the searchlight can be. [*Laughs.*]

Isabella [*with dignity*]. But, dearest girl, you know all this is against the law.

Susan. Now listen here, sweetest. I don't mind you being President—I love you to be President—so long as you don't try and come the President over *me*.

Harlequin. Even Presidency shouldn't be carried to extremes.

Susan. Isn't he lovely? Of course, Bella, I can see you're only practising President on your old Susan. Thank God women know far better than men that laws always depend on circumstances! Sometimes a law is a law, and sometimes it isn't. Besides, you're going to alter that silly law, aren't you?

Isabella [*in a peculiar tone*]. Still, we are all subject to the law. Even I am. Suppose—

Susan. Suppose anything happens? [*Laughs.*] It's arranged that if I'm not on board at midnight the cruiser is to fire on the city. That would settle matters, I fancy. I needn't have told you anything about it, but I couldn't bear to leave you without a word. I couldn't bear it. So I've told you. We women must stick together, old girl. [*She embraces Isabella again. Then they both smile.*] You won't let on, will you? I do hate gun-fire—especially heavy guns.

Isabella. Of course I won't; but you oughtn't to have told me. Now you've told me I shall have to pretend—

Susan. Naturally. But a few lies will do you all the good in the world. Get you into practice for your majestic profession.

Harlequin. But where is the necessity for untruth? All we have to do is to decide that the last five minutes have never been. A mere effort of the imagination. Susan hasn't spoken. You haven't heard. Therefore you don't know. Therefore you won't have to tell any fibs. Quite simple. [*Bows.*]

Susan. You pet. You know, Bella, I'm just mad about Harlequin. Of course I can't say how long it will last. It *might* last for quite a long time. Anyway for the present I merely can—not—live without him. He's the symbol for me of adventure and romance and thrills and constant change. And I must have constant change. I've stood your delicious Caspo much longer than I ever thought I should.

Isabella. Then your brother has consented to the marriage after all?

Susan. I've never asked him for his consent.

Isabella. But I mean he accepts the engagement amiably?

Susan. He's never what I should call amiable. Male Maddoxes seldom are. But he's swallowed it all right. Do you know what I did? I told

him if he didn't I should disgrace the family. That shook him.

Harlequin. My future brother-in-law's smile, when he saw that he had to smile, was one of the most wonderful experiences of my life.

Isabella. What do you intend to do in England, you two?

Susan. First of all I shall make Harly the rage. I know all the chief millionaires.

Isabella. What have they got to do with it?

Susan. The millionaires own the newspapers. And the newspapers own the country. Then, after the press stunt, I shall get Harly on to the music-hall stage. That's quite the *chic* thing in England nowadays. His success will be terrible. Then he'll go into Parliament. Every politician ought to begin on the music-hall stage. It's the finest possible training for modern statesmanship. In ten years Harly will be Prime Minister, and all the newspapers and the super-tax payers will agree that he's very bad, but that he's the only possible man for the job.

Harlequin. And in my speeches I shall proudly refer to the fact that I was once a valet, and that will be the proof that democracy has really arrived. You see we've got it all arranged.

Susan. You infinite treasure. [*Kisses him.*] Well, Bella, we must be getting along.

Isabella [*in a new tone*]. I suppose you wouldn't care to take me with you?

Susan [after a pause, laughing]. And I thought I was the only woman on earth with a sense of humour!

Isabella [forcing a laugh]. Well, you see you aren't.

Susan. You will miss me, won't you, dearest. I hate not to be missed. [Kissing her.]

Isabella. I'll miss you with all my heart.

Susan. Mind you, I wouldn't have left—no, really I wouldn't—if everything hadn't gone right for you. But you're on velvet now. You've been elected President by a big majority, and you'll do just what you like. It'll be *such* fun for you.

Isabella. You know I can scarcely believe I *am* President.

Susan. Oh! You'll soon begin to believe it. By to-morrow you'll believe it like anything. It'll be the greatest lark any woman ever had. Bella, my life will be drab compared to yours. My word, you *will* live.

Isabella. I hope I shall. I say, Susan.

Susan. Yes, dear?

Isabella. Is your brother coming to say good-bye to me? I haven't seen him since—you know!

Susan. I know. But I shouldn't *think* he'd come. He feels a bit awkward. He's got a sort of idea you're hurt. You see you don't know the Maddoxes. They're like most English upper-class families. They're supposed to be free to behave just how they like, and people aren't sup-

posed to mind. In England people *don't* mind. But of course here it's different. You aren't an English girl. If you were an English girl he'd come and say good-bye just as blandly as if he was asking you to pass the sugar. That's England.

Harlequin. I long to be there.

Susan [*to Isabella, with tenderness*]. Darlingest chocolate-cream! I could eat you. [*Kissing Isabella finally.*] A long, long good-bye.

[*Harlequin kisses Isabella's hand.*]

[*Enter Pierrot and Columbine.*]

Susan [*casually*]. Hello, you two.

[*Exeunt Susan and Harlequin.*]

Columbine [*indicating Susan*]. She's got nice manners. Do you know the palace police wanted to stop us from coming into the gardens?

Isabella. I gave orders I wasn't to be disturbed.

Pierrot. Quite a sound policy, my dear, especially at first.

Columbine. Still, it's a pretty thing I can't see my own sister just because she happens to be President of this so-called republic. Considering my husband's rank—

Isabella [*kissing her*]. My dear girl! How's baby?

Columbine. He's splendid, really—I mean his constitution—and his brain. He certainly said something like 'Mum' this morning. And I

don't care what Pierrot says—he *does* say words.

Isabella. Good.

Columbine. But the poor little thing's been shamefully neglected lately—this frightful election business.

Pierrot. We called to congratulate you, *Isabella*. No one ever congratulated a successful rival more heartily than I do.

Isabella. Oh, thanks ever so much. I'm so glad you've come. [*To Pierrot.*] You're the one man who can give me some useful hints. I don't know how to begin.

Columbine. Begin what?

Isabella. Begin being President.

Columbine. I should have thought that was easy enough. But of course I'm nobody.

Isabella [*to Pierrot, apprehensively*]. You see I don't understand anything *about* government.

Pierrot. Nobody does. That's what explains the world to-day. You have to learn to be a grocer, but not to be a statesman.

Isabella. But how *do* I begin?

Pierrot. My dear, I will put the experience of a lifetime into a dozen words. Don't begin. Let your permanent officials begin. Then at the first sign of trouble show them with great calmness and kindness that they are hopeless idiots, and gradually introduce your own policy. Gradually, I say. Gradually!

Isabella. Oh! But that won't do for me at all.

Pierrot. No. I was afraid it wouldn't. Now, I'll give you a bit of advice that I hope you *will* take. Don't do anything whatever until to-morrow morning. The regeneration of the earth has been put off for some thousands of years. It can well wait another twenty-four hours, while you get a good night's rest.

Columbine. Slip out and come and see baby.

Pierrot. There's something else. I didn't really come to congratulate you. I came to warn you. Have you heard anything about a conspiracy against you?

Isabella [*low*]. Yes.

Pierrot. So have I.

Columbine. You never told me.

Pierrot. No, my child. Because you said you didn't want to listen to another word about politics.

Columbine. You ought to have told me.

Pierrot. I expect old Doctor's at the bottom of it.

Isabella. Well, he practically told me so himself.

Pierrot. The devil he did! That sounds bad.

Isabella. What ought I to do?

Pierrot. Shut him up.

Isabella [*emphatically*]. I will, too! And Capitan as well. He's in it as well.

Pierrot. Yes, I daresay he's in it. But if I were you I wouldn't shut *him* up. Leave him a

free hand and he'll ruin any conspiracy. By the way, there may be a hostile demonstration outside the palace this afternoon.

Isabella [*controlling her alarm*]. Oh!

Pierrot. You see, quite a lot of people are mortally afraid of a woman-president. All men are afraid of all women [*with a look at Columbine*], and most women are afraid of each other. I saw a whole crowd of students marching up the road not long since. Students are always Tories when reform is in the air, and always radical when reaction is in the air. Result of education, no doubt. I shouldn't be surprised if these fellows were coming here to make a fuss.

Columbine. You told me they were coming to cheer Isabella.

Pierrot. I didn't want to alarm you, my sweet. [*A distant noise is heard.*] There they are. Doesn't sound much like cheering, does it? [*The noise dies down.*]

Isabella. But I always get on so well with young men.

Pierrot. Yes. One by one they're delightful. But in the mass they're just hyenas. [*The noise recommences.*] Hear the howls. Don't worry. It's nothing. They'll get tired and go away.

Columbine [*alarmed*]. But baby! Supposing—

Isabella. Oh! Shut up about baby. *Pierrot*, I'll take your advice about doing nothing to-day.

But you must be here at nine o'clock to-morrow morning. I shall want you.

Columbine. You'll start his dyspepsia again—that's what you'll do. And he can't come to-morrow because he's got to paint the garden gate.

Isabella [angrily]. Shut up, I tell you. You home-women are the most callous, selfish creatures that God ever created. If the mouth of hell opened you'd only think of the heat spoiling the paint on the garden gate. [*To Pierrot, controlling herself.*] Please be here at nine o'clock. I shall want to form my Ministry, and you've got to be in it.

[*The noise suddenly increases. There is a great sound of broken glass. The three look at each other.*]

Pierrot. Believe me, it's nothing, except prosperity for plumbers.

[*Louder and more various noises.*]

Isabella. Wait a moment. [*She rushes off towards the palace buildings.*]

Columbine [seizing Pierrot]. Where are you going?

Pierrot. I must look after her. Loose me.

Columbine. And what about me? You'd look after her and desert your wife! And there's baby.

Pierrot. But I tell you it's nothing. Only she might—

Columbine. If it's nothing, come along with

me instantly. Down by the shore-path. I know it. You might at least see to the protection of our little home before all this grand statesmanship. [*She pulls him.*]

Pierrot. Very well! Very well! I'll come quietly.

[*Exeunt Pierrot and Columbine towards the sea.*]

[*The stage remains empty for a few moments while the noise dies down.*]

[*Enter Isabella.*]

Isabella [*speaking sharply to people off*]. I tell you I wasn't touched. Please leave me alone. [*She comes forward.*] *Pierrot!* *Columbine!* [*She is evidently disturbed to find that Pierrot and Columbine have gone.*]

[*Enter Maddox.*]

Maddox [*casually*]. I heard his ex-Majesty was with you.

Isabella [*showing her bewilderment*]. No! He's gone.

Maddox. Oh! *He* got the wind up?

Isabella. Of course he hasn't. How did you get in here?

Maddox. With my fists.

Isabella. Did you want to see Pierrot?

Maddox. No.

Isabella. Then what is it you wanted?

Maddox. Wanted to see you. To say good-bye. Felt I must. . . . Susan's told you.

Isabella. Good-bye.

Maddox. I want to apologise.

Isabella. What for?

Maddox. I wish to God you wouldn't ask such damn silly questions. You know what for. Way I behaved—the last time we met.

Isabella. Well, perhaps I also was rather clumsy.

Maddox. I'm not going to make excuses. Never could. I hate excuses. I just apologise. That clear?

Isabella. That's all right.

Maddox. Thanks. [*Takes her hand.*]

Isabella. So if everything doesn't go exactly as you wish, you've arranged with that British warship to fire on my city?

Maddox [*dropping her hand*]. Oh, hang it! . . . Susan's chatter, I suppose. Well, I apologise for that too.

Isabella. Oh! Please don't mention such a trifle.

Maddox. Good-bye.

Isabella. Aren't you going to give me any advice before you leave?

Maddox. Advice?

Isabella. Well, you know I'm in a very difficult position.

Maddox. You asked for it.

Isabella. You put it into my head to ask for it.

Maddox [*rather impressed*]. Did I?

Isabella. And at any rate I've shown *I'm* not

afraid of responsibility. [*Looks at him accusingly.*]

Maddox. You have.

Isabella. You've got more political common-sense than anybody else here, and I was thinking that before you went you might find something useful to say.

Maddox. You mean general advice on the whole situation?

Isabella. I do.

Maddox. Simple enough. Have a general election at once. Dissolve the National Assembly. Get a temporary ministry together, and make the ex-King the Prime Minister. That'll keep 'em all quiet. Pierrot still has prestige.

Isabella. You've heard there's a conspiracy against me?

Maddox [*casually*]. A conspiracy, eh? [*Isabella nods.*] Not surprising. Who's in it?

Isabella. Old Doctor. Or if he isn't he soon will be.

Maddox. I'd like to wring that gentleman's neck.

Isabella. Well, if you could spare a minute to wring his neck before you leave I should really be very much obliged. Capitan's in it as well.

Maddox. Take Capitan into the Ministry. He'd think his beautiful eyes had conquered again. You'd learn everything and the conspiracy would be scotched.

Isabella. Capitan in my Ministry! But he's a thief. All the old lot stole public money.

Maddox. Not at all. You mustn't call people names. Capitan, like the rest, *accepted* money. It used to be the correct thing to do. Habit. Tradition.

Isabella. But supposing I take Capitan in, what's going to happen to my programme of reform?

Maddox. I've heard about your programme of reform.

Isabella. Who told you?

Maddox. It's all over the city.

Isabella. Well, it's *your* programme of reform.

Maddox. It may be. But you needn't break your neck over it. Don't go and give the public the stomach-ache. Teaspoonfuls! Gently. A sip at a time. Remember the human stomach. And while you're waiting for the elections get your administration into order. Nothing impresses the public like thoroughly efficient and honest administration. Public's a fool, but it isn't a damn fool. But above all things go slow. You've got to handle the most ticklish old contraption in the universe.

Isabella. What's that?

Maddox. Merely human nature. People say human nature never changes. That's idiotic. It's changing all the time, but it's so slow in

changing that you hardly notice it. And it can't go any quicker. That's the point. Therefore don't rush things. Take 'em gradually. Gradually!

Isabella. Oh! Gradually! That's what you all say!

Maddox. Yes, and I'll say it seventy-seven times. Look at your father's experience.

Isabella. It seems to me we're just about back where we were when father started.

Maddox. Of course you aren't. Everything's moved. You've got to go about a thousand miles and you've gone about a yard and a half. It's a lot. Anyhow it's as fast as old human nature can hobble along.

Isabella [*persuaded and courageous*]. I see.

Maddox. Mind you, you're in for a perfect hell of a time, anyhow.

Isabella. I'm ready for it. [*Sucks her left forearm, which up to now has been concealed in the long sleeve of the Pierrot mantle.*]

Maddox. Why! That's blood!

Isabella. It is. A stone.

Maddox. But you said you weren't hurt.

Isabella. I did. I suppose I'd better wrap it up. [*Tries to bind it herself.*]

Maddox. Here. You've never had lessons in first aid. Give me that limb. Give it here, please.

Isabella. Don't hurt me.

Maddox. I'll try not to. Can't guarantee it.

[*As he is bandaging the arm.*] I shan't go to England.

Isabella. Oh yes, you will.

Maddox. I bet you what you like I don't. I shall stay here. I'll run off in a minute or two and send a wireless to the ship. Susan and Harlequin will have started in the first boat by this time.

Isabella. But why have you changed your mind all of a sudden?

Maddox [*moving away*]. It's these physical contacts do it. Your blooming forearm. [*A pause.*] The fact is, I feel I've got a responsibility. I don't expect you'll let me help, but I shall stop here in *case* you want me. I should be rather useful in a *real* row.

Isabella. A *real* row?

Maddox. A *real* row.

Isabella [*somewhat overcome*]. There's the sun just setting.

Maddox. Yes, but you'll find it'll rise all right again to-morrow morning. Usually does.

Isabella [*looking up at him*]. That's your philosophy?

Maddox. It is. I say, *Isabella*, have you honestly accepted my apology?

Isabella. Of course.

Maddox. Prove it.

Isabella. I can't prove it any more.

Maddox. Yes, you can. Marry me.

Isabella. After what you said that day? Never! Marry a 'bachelor by birth and inclination!' Never in this world!

Maddox. That's final?

Isabella. Absolutely. . . . Still, women have been known to change their minds. [*They kiss.*]

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